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THE
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AUBREY AT THE LONE INN DOOR,

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AUBREY CONYERS,

BY

MISS E.M. STEWART



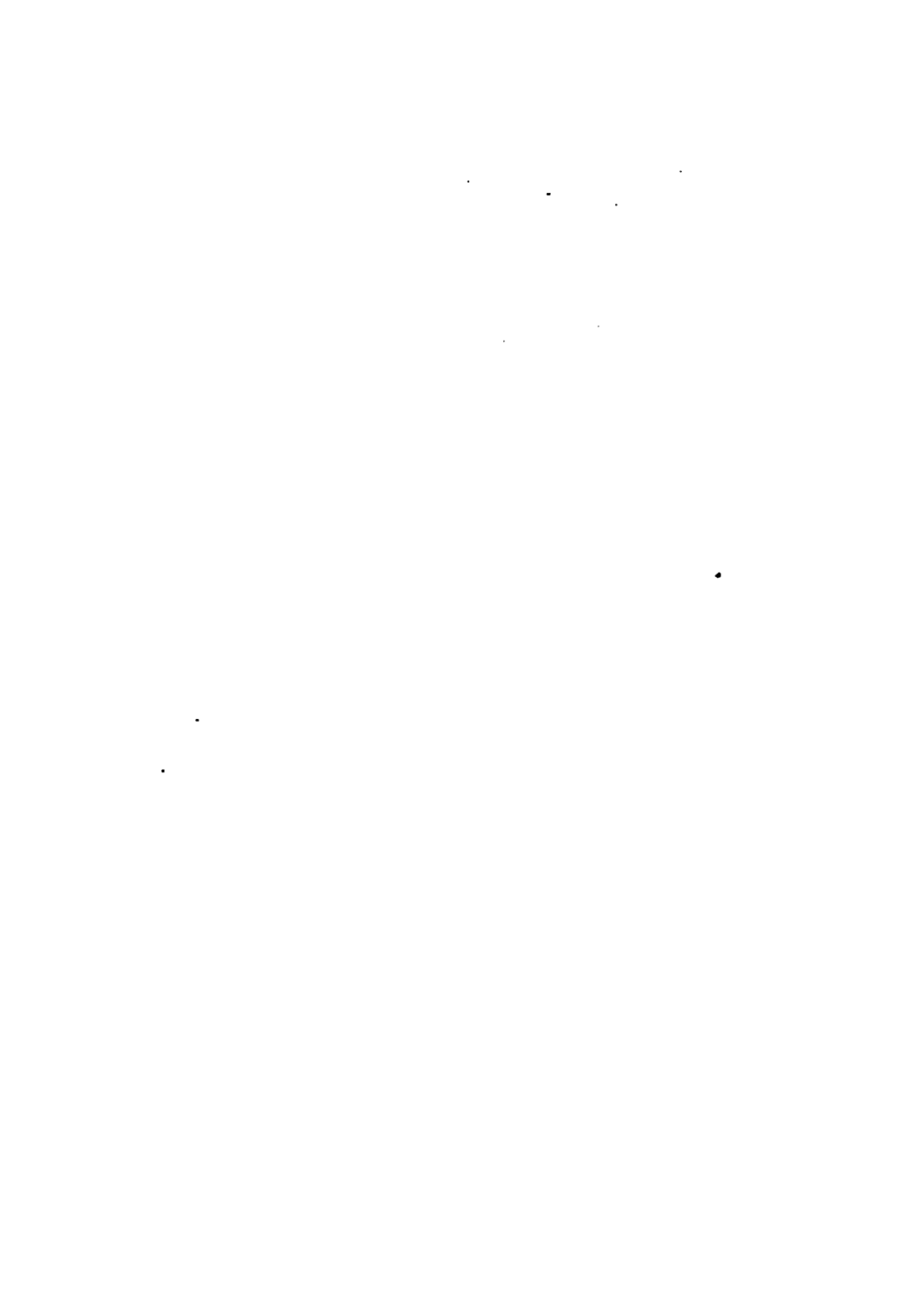
The death struggle on the rocky ledge.

WITH NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.

LONDON.

INGRAM COOKE & Co.

1853



AUBREY CONYERS:

OR,

THE LORDSHIP OF ALLERDALE.

BY

MISS E. M. STEWART,

AUTHOR OF "TALES OF THE CITY OF LONDON," ETC.

With numerous Engravings.

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AUBREY CONYERS:

OR,

THE LORDSHIP OF ALLERDALE.

CHAPTER I.

“ Who would bear the whips and scorns of time ;
The oppressor's scorn, the proud man's contumely ;
The insolence of office, and the spurns,
Which patient merit of the unworthy takes.”

HAMLET.

A GLOOMY day, at the latter end of a chill and wet October, was beginning to close with such symptoms of a tempestuous night, that a solitary traveller, in one of the wild districts of Cumberland, for a moment checking his horse, cast his eyes anxiously round in the hope of discerning some place of shelter. It was scarcely possible to imagine a prospect more dreary ; around him lay a wild, dismal heath, occasionally sinking into hollows, or marshes, which would make it dangerous travelling after dark. To the left, this heath was bounded by chaotic masses of mountain, but this boundary gloomed only in a dark broken line against the horizon, a nearer approach would have exhibited it in a more fearful form, for among those hills were situated some of the

lead mines of the county, and deep gullies and yawning precipices, 'dark even at noonday, assumed an aspect absolutely appalling in the thickening gloom of a winter evening. To the right, amid that gloom, the traveller's eye could detect no boundary to the heath, save a trivial gleam of the sunset, breaking through the stormy clouds. The plashing of some large drops of rain, and a more bitter gust of wind, which came howling over the waste like the cry of an evil spirit, warned the traveller of the rapid approach of the tempest which had been threatened for the last hour. In the increasing obscurity, however, if there were on that desolate heath any human habitation, he could not discover it, and wrapping his large military mantle more closely round him, he put spurs to his horse, and prepared to face the pelting of the storm of elements with the same calm courage of endurance which had so often supported him in the conflict of life. A bitter smile even crossed his lip, as the wind still rose in louder gusts, and drove a sheet of rain, hail, and sleet against his person, and he muttered, partly appropriating the words of Lear, "I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness : neither rain, hail, wind, nor thunder, are my creditors ;" "and yet," he added, with a groan of mingled pride and anguish, "you, my poor mother, my dear sister Adela ; you have to face a storm more terrible than this ; the bitter tongues of angry wretches who hold your poverty for your sin, and insolently tell you that you will not pay, because you cannot ! And the sickness of my mother, and the beauty of my darling sister ; oh ! what cruel aggravations are they to the cup of gall, while I, alas, alas ! how little can I do to assist them ; how small a relief to their necessities will be the portion of my poor pay which I have to-day sent them !"

While thinking and soliloquizing thus of his miseries, Aubrey Conyers forgot the gathering darkness and the increasing fury of the storm. The wind roared and screamed over the waste; the rain, mixed with hail and snow, was driven before it, and lay whitely on the traveller's mantle, and drenched the rich curls of raven hair which escaped from beneath his foraging cap. But Aubrey Conyers felt not the storm; it is indeed a truth that "when the mind's free, the body's delicate;" the grief and anguish, the expression almost of despair, that contracted his noble features, and burned with a gloomy fire in his large dark eye, were not the effect of corporal pain. He thought bitterly of the smallness of the sum which, out of the scanty pay of a lieutenant in a marching regiment, he had been able to send to his distressed mother and sister, and he felt, too, that the pain with which they would receive the money was no less, for their affection, like his own, made light of their individual sufferings; and he knew that they were but too well aware how many and grievous were the mortifications which he had to endure among his brother subalterns, who were supplied by their connexions with money,—with how much difficulty and privation, even of the most common necessities, he kept up that appearance of a gentleman which it was imperative for him to support. The most cruel sting of poverty is that which pierces us through the affections; Aubrey Conyers and his mother and sister would not have suffered so deeply had they loved each other less. There are some persons who are the butt of evil fortune from the cradle to the grave, and of this number had been the father of Aubrey Conyers. Belonging to a decayed branch of an ancient family, and endowed by nature with great talents, he had yet lived and died in embarrassments, the original source of

which was, doubtless, that his tastes and inclinations were always at issue with the mercantile pursuits to which he had been by necessity devoted. Mr. Conyers was not fit for trade ; it was at variance with his principles to cheat others, and he was so easily cheated that a wealthy uncle on the mother's side, who had introduced him to mercantile business, disgusted with what he called his carelessness, refused all assistance in a crisis of his nephew's affairs, which resulted in bankruptcy, and within six months of its date the broken-hearted father of Conyers was laid in his grave. Aubrey was then but twelve years of age, and his sister scarcely six, and as the health of Mrs. Conyers was very feeble, and the family had no near relation save the selfish uncle who had refused assistance to preserve his nephew from total ruin, their condition would have been very pitiable indeed, but for the aid of a distant cousin of Mrs. Conyers, who received her into his house, and was at the expense of educating Aubrey for the military profession. Unfortunately, however, for the Conyers family, General St. Leger was one of those persons who do kind things, not from principle but from caprice, and after supporting the widow and her daughter for years, presenting Aubrey with a commission, and intimating that he should bequeath to him the bulk of his large fortune, he wholly withdrew his countenance, because Adela Conyers, a beautiful girl of seventeen, refused to become the wife of an ill-tempered man almost treble her age, an old companion in arms of the General. In this displeasure Aubrey also was included, for no other reason than that he refused to exert his influence with his sister to make her permanently unhappy. The threat, too, which the General used of withdrawing all pecuniary assistance was unwisely urged upon a spirit so proud as that of Aubrey Conyers, and when he took the

General at his word, on being ordered to quit his house for ever, the perverse and irascible old man, who, with all his faults, had been much attached to Aubrey, inflicted upon himself, in repelling the almost filial love of the young man, a wound no less severe than that which he meant only for the objects of his wrath.

Three weary years had elapsed since then ; the path of promotion, which Aubrey could not pave with gold, was not easy of access, and the uncertain earnings of his sister as a governess, with his lieutenant's pay, were their sole means of supporting themselves and a mother, whose miserably ill health was made worse by the want of necessary comforts, and peace of mind. Oh, it was no wonder that Aubrey so little heeded for himself that bitter cheerless night ; his thoughts were with his sister,—thinly clad, and perhaps wearily seeking her home at that very hour, after a day of annoyance and toil, and possible insult in the exercise of that odious profession which left her at the scant mercy of her own sex, of its most selfish and worldly-minded members, well-to-do wives, and doting mothers of ugly evil-conditioned urchins, who were in their eyes models of amiability and grace, and who, it was never to be forgotten, most heartily hated Miss Conyers for the youth and beauty, the talent and accomplishments which they did not themselves possess. And after the sufferings of the day, to what a home must the poor Adela return,—to nurse a sick mother, to a scanty table, perhaps to a rapacious landlady. But no ; from that aggravation of distress, the money which Aubrey had that morning transmitted from his pay would for a time release those dear ones ; and with a heart somewhat lightened by that thought, he again endeavoured through the pelting storm to discover some place of shelter. A far off, through the driving

sleet, he then perceived the red twinkling of a light. He had been told at the post town, that on the border of that moor which he was now crossing there were scattered a few huts, inhabited by some of the miners who worked among the adjacent hills, mingled with characters of a worse repute, one of these last being the landlord of a miserable inn, who, unless report sorely belied him, had more than once levied an hospitality of which it was somewhat dangerous to partake. Aubrey Conyers hesitated what course to pursue ; he was seven miles distant from the town in which his regiment was quartered, and nearly five from the house of Mr. Thornthwaite, the sturdy and kind-hearted north-country squire, who, surmising the narrow circumstances of the young officer, had bidden him regard his house as a home so long as the regiment was quartered within a reasonable distance, and whenever he could be spared from the duties connected with it. The storm each moment increased in fury, the wind raved over the heath in long wild gusts, and the snow that began to mingle with the hail and rain threw a ghastly glare on the otherwise palpable darkness. Dangerous morasses were, Aubrey also knew, dotted over the heath, and beyond it the road lay among wild rocks and ravines, where a false step of the horse would cast both it and its rider down some frightful precipice. There appeared, then, no alternative but to risk accepting such hospitality as might be tendered by the inhabitants of the dwelling whence proceeded the glimmering ray of light. This object even was not accomplished without difficulty, for the ray was illumined only by the glare of the fast-thickening flakes of snow, and the horse which Aubrey rode more than once stumbled or sunk on the miry and uneven ground. As more nearly he approached the light, the sounds of rude revelry were heard amid the pauses

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of the gust, and a long low irregular building loomed forth, while the ray now gleamed so strongly through the chinks of the shutters that it tinged with a ruddy glow the snow that spread like a carpet before the dwelling. At the moment that Aubrey approached the door, over which flapped a sign, the device on which it was too dark to discover, a more furious and bitter gust of wind overwhelmed, as it went roaring along the waste, both the sound of his horse's hoofs and of the merriment of the persons within the house. Aubrey dismounted from his horse, and as a lull in the tempest gave him a hope of being heard, he knocked loudly with the butt-end of his riding-whip on the door of the house; the sound of laughter, which was again breaking forth, instantaneously died away, and so long a pause ensued, even after Aubrey had repeated his summons, that involuntarily he put his hand upon the pistols which, in contemplating the possibility of being benighted in that wild district, he had concealed in his bosom. Some scuffling of feet, too, and grumbling of rough voices he thought he could distinguish amid the noise of the storm, and presently an upper casement was opened, and the shrill shrewish voice of a woman demanded his business.

It should have been observed that this lone dwelling, without another habitation in sight, stood upon the very verge of the moor, while in its immediate background rose a mass of barren rocky hills, whose inhospitable summits were covered with a veil of snow. The suspicions which Aubrey had entertained of the persons inhabiting this dwelling were increased by the voice of the woman, for he was certain that they were the tones of men which he had previously heard. He smiled, however, in the recollection that poverty is secure against thieves, and except a mere trifle, he had left the residue of his pay in his desk at the barracks; he therefore

preferred his request for shelter from the storm without any great apprehension of the persons inhabiting the lone house. It was not, however, till after much mumbling and muttering as to the danger to a lone woman of admitting late travellers on a dreary night, that this unamiable specimen of the softer sex quitted the window from which she had spoken, and proceeded to open the door. If her voice had made an unfavourable impression on Aubrey, her personal appearance was certainly not more in her favour. Of a stature nearly equal to his own, and which was awkward and ungainly in a woman, her person, lean and raw-boned, was entirely destitute of the fulness and just proportions which would have corrected what might be called the deformity of her height. The countenance, too, of this woman was of that unfortunate cast, in which an absolute ugliness of feature is unredeemed by an agreeable expression; abject poverty spoke in her coarse slovenly garments, and guilt, perhaps, no less than misery, in the small black eyes which flashed vindictively beneath the bent brows, over the sunken and pale cheeks, which famine rather than ill health seemed to have robbed of their colour.

"Make haste in, sir, pray!" she said, as Aubrey, involuntarily recoiling from her, hesitated for a moment on the threshold of the door. On his demanding where he should find a place of shelter for his horse, she replied sneeringly—"You see, sir, this is but a poor wayside alehouse, not an inn; we are not used to gentlemen asking for stabling for their horses, but we have a shed in which the creature will be safe from the weather. Here, Giles, Giles!"

In obedience to this summons, an awkward ill-looking lad, of about eighteen or twenty, issued from an inner apartment, for the house door opened into what seemed the kitchen of

the dwelling, and, rubbing his eyes and grumbling at having been roused from his first sleep, took the bridle rein from the hand of Conyers, and was preparing to lead the animal away, when Aubrey, alleging very truly that the lodging of his horse was almost more important than his own, said that he should like to see the place in which it was to be bestowed.

"Thee looks murrain fine to turn thee into a hostler!" growled the lad, as he took a lanthorn, with which the woman now furnished him; "but just as ye wull; thee mayst see where I put thine horse."

The keenness of the wind which blew in their faces, and the driving snow-storm, scarce permitted Conyers to execute his design of examining the exterior of the building, but the glare of lights from an upper casement convinced him that the house had other inhabitants than the woman and the lad Giles, who he now understood to be her son. The shed of which the woman had spoken, was, however, a better defence from the weather than he had hoped to find it, and a quantity of fodder seemed to intimate that it was not so unusual for travellers with horses to be accommodated at that lone house.

As, while conversing with the woman, Conyers had caught sight of a blazing fire in the kitchen, he was not unwilling to hasten there out of the piercing cold. The kitchen into which he was then ushered was a long low-roofed apartment, with a fire-place large enough to have roasted a sheep whole. In the recesses on either side of this enormous fire-place were several fine hams hung to dry in the smoke; while the table which the hostess presently set forth, after removing from it various flagons and empty drinking cups, betokened an abundance which Conyers had not expected in so mean a dwelling. The refreshments consisted of a large rabbit-pie, a loaf of

wheaten bread, and a jug of strong ale. In casting his eyes round the apartment, too, Conyers observed among the culinary utensils that overhung the dresser a pair of pistols and a cutlass. The woman as it happened caught the direction of his eyes, for, with a futile attempt to smooth her rugged brow, she said, in a tone of affected jocularly, "Ah, your honour, them pistols and cutlass are awfulsome things to look at, but ours is a lone house, and it would not be safe to live in it without them, specially as I and my niece, Magdalen, are forced to stay here a great deal by ourselves. Indeed, my good man and our two oldest boys have but now finished their suppers and gone out, for poor folks must work night and day in spite of wind and weather ; and it is but badly we should get on, after all, if it were not for the help of Madge's sweetheart, who has given us meat, and drink too, when we have wanted both !"

While the hostess was still speaking, one of two doors which Conyers had noticed on either side of the dresser, opened, and a young woman entered who, it seemed, was the niece to whom she had just alluded. If there was something to excite an unusual and even painful attention in the countenance of the aunt, that of the niece was no less remarkable, and for the very opposite reason of its extraordinary beauty ; and though this beauty was of a character rather to command than to captivate, yet was it so decided in its class, that it could not fail to fix the eye of the most careless observer. Her height, like that of her aunt, above the usual standard of women, Magdalen possessed in a high degree that grace of symmetry in which her relation was totally deficient, so perfectly formed, indeed, was she, that it was only by comparison that her very superior height would have been observed. Her features were no less faultless than her form, though

the very accuracy of their outline contributed to give them something of a severe expression, which was not corrected by the arching eyebrows, or piercing glance of the large black eyes, to which even the extraordinary length of the lashes could not give that softness which is the greatest charm of woman's eye. The complexion of Magdalen, as is not uncommon with dark-haired women, was as pure and no less colourless than alabaster, but her beautiful lips were of a rich red, and when she spoke disclosed teeth whiter than pearls. The garb of this young woman was only of coarse brown stuff, but it was neatly made and worn; for Magdalen, though unhappily placed by her birth among those who were worse than humble in their class, was one of nature's own proud ladies, and endowed with that elegance of movement and demeanour which a drawing-room education sometimes fails to bestow.

"Magdalen, my child," said the woman of the house, with, as it struck Conyers, an affectation even of kindness in her tone and manner, "I know you are tired and worn out with all the sad work of the week, but will you get the traveller's room ready for this good gentleman? I must stay here, you know, to make the coffee, and have things ready against your uncle and the boys return."

"The traveller's room, aunt!" murmured the young woman, in a faint tone, and with her face becoming, as Aubrey thought, even a degree paler, "that room, aunt!"

"Well, that room!" returned the aunt, sharply, "'tis a poor place, I know, but 'tis the best we have, and your uncle has patched the old wainscot; and this gentleman, who is a soldier I take it, knows too much of the world, I dare say, to be over nice about how he sleeps when stopped on a journey by a night like this. Go at once now, like a good

girl, for the gentleman, I have no doubt, is tired too ; and here are some clean sheets for the bed ; they are well-aired ; so go now and get the bed ready !”

The young woman took the sheets, which her aunt produced from one of the drawers in the dresser, and left the room without further observation, but the sufficiency of domestic comfort which the possession implied, contradicted too strongly the aunt's complaints of poverty, and strengthened the uneasy apprehensions in the mind of Aubrey.

He would have proposed at once to pursue his journey rather than trust to so doubtful a shelter, but the storm seemed even to have increased in violence, and howled round the house with a deafening fury, dashing the sleet and snow against the casements, a thin white ridge of the latter drifting even under the door sill, from which the fire was too distant for the warmth of the room immediately to melt it away.

The boy Giles had crept away to bed again, and even with his assistance the two women could not, had they been so inclined, have prevented Aubrey's departure ; but not only did he feel that his peril from a probable exposure throughout the night to so pitiless a storm would be scarcely less than any he would encounter at the lone house, but he was not without an apprehension that the revellers whose voices he had heard on approaching it, had not actually withdrawn, but were keeping watch in some other apartment. Were the inhabitants of this house, however, the dangerous creatures whom he apprehended, Aubrey's best security he felt was in his poverty, as the worst of bravos will scarce shed blood, untempted either by revenge or gain. So soon, therefore, as the young woman, Magdalen, returned, Aubrey drew forth his purse, the contents of which he flattered himself were too slender to provoke a cupidity which, as he had taken care to

exhibit his pistols, it might be dangerous to gratify. Telling the hostess that whatever might be the weather he must pursue his journey with the break of day, he offered at once to pay for his entertainment, and the charge made was so moderate, and the manner of the woman so natural, as she assured him that her son Giles would be up early, and would supply him with breakfast before his departure, that it almost disarmed his suspicions.

CHAPTER II.

"I know two dull fierce outlaws,
Who think man's spirit as a worm's ; and they
Would trample out for any slight caprice,
The meanest or the noblest life."

THE CENCI.

THE hostess herself ushered Aubrey into his sleeping apartment. This was, in truth, dreary enough ; the uncarpeted boards were worm-eaten, and creaked beneath the tread, and the furniture was mean and scanty, save in respect to the bedding, which was tolerably good, the bedstead of oak being hung with curtains of dark blue stuff, and standing in one corner of the room, which was large ; and it should be observed, apparently remote from the other sleeping apartments, as Aubrey had been conducted up a flight of stairs, and through a long narrow passage to reach it. Setting the candle on a table, the hostess wished him good night, and somewhat hastily retreated. Aubrey was very weary both in body and mind ; the weariness of the mind wofully increases that of the body, and his natural impulse would have been to throw himself immediately on the bed, which, with its dark curtains and snowy sheets, looked a very comfortable haven on that rough night, when the wailing of the wind and beating of the storm without enhanced the sense of enjoyment and warmth within.

But Aubrey Conyers had no thought of rest ; he still considered the character of the inmates of the house too doubt-

ful for that sense of security which would allow him to trust himself to sleep ; and his first care now was to examine the chamber for means of escape, should such prove necessary. The single casement which the room contained overlooked only a kind of garden or waste ground belonging to the house, and this was, so far as Aubrey could distinguish, surrounded by a wall so high that it would be impossible to climb it without a ladder, or some other apparatus for the purpose. The casement, too, was not only a considerable distance from the ground, but on endeavouring to open it Conyers found that it was strongly bolted on the outer side, a circumstance which revived all his suspicions. Upon a further examination of the chamber, too, he discovered another door than that by which he had entered ; this door was opposite to the bed, and like the casement was secured on the outer side : the wood round the lock, however, was much decayed, and on Conyers shaking it with some violence, it gave way, and he had almost fallen on the floor of a small inner apartment. Anxious to discover whether there were any staircase or passage communicating with this chamber, by means of which access might be obtained to his own, he brought forwards the candle, but recoiled with a sensation of unwonted horror at the lugubrious scene which that inner room presented. The limits of the room were not more extensive than those of a closet in the mansions of the old time, but like the contiguous chamber it contained a casement, and another door, opposite to that by which Conyers had entered. This door, however, he did not immediately observe, for while the miserable apartment contained not an article of furniture, in its centre stood a bier rudely formed of a rough plank of wood, supported at either end by a stool, and on this bier was stretched a slender form, wrapped from head

to foot in a sheet. The first thought of Conyers was, that he beheld the lifeless form of some victim of the, as he now apprehended, murderous wretches in whose house he had taken shelter, his next was to ascertain if the corpse bore any mark of violence. . Aubrey Conyers was constitutionally and morally brave, apart from the habits of his profession, but a cold chill fastened upon his heart, and his hand, despite his utmost firmness, slightly trembled, as he drew the covering from the head and shoulders of the corpse.

Never was the awful mystery of death presented in an aspect less terrible than that which he then beheld. But for the pallor of the skin, the dark circle round the slightly sunken eyes, and a something too fixed and mournful in the smile that yet lingered round the mouth, he might have thought that the beautiful boy, stretched so still and cold on that unseemly couch, was not dead but sleeping. So fair, indeed, was the face of death in that youth, whose years could scarce have numbered seventeen, that Aubrey forgot for a brief space the strange and alarming circumstances of his own situation, and stood in a kind of religious awe, wholly unmixed with any feeling of repugnance or horror, gazing on the pale features whose serenity spoke of that peace which the world cannot give. Then it was, on a longer inspection, he discovered in the features of the dead boy so close a resemblance to those of Magdalen, that they seemed to have been cast in the same mould : he might have been her twin brother, but that there was a disparity in their years, as Magdalen could scarce be judged less than three or four and twenty years of age. The beautiful countenance of the dead youth was, however, much wasted, the finely chiselled outline was very thin and sharp ; Aubrey judged that he had died of consumption, or, perhaps, of a disease more terrible,



AUBREY'S DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD BODY.

starvation, utter want. He remembered what the hostess had said of the sufferings of her family from poverty, and how she had spoken to Magdalen of the sorrows of the last sad week, and he severely rebuked himself for the hard thoughts and frightful suspicions he had entertained of those people, who perhaps had no crime but their poverty, which had probably induced them to conceal the fact that the awful presence of death was in their house. Very reverently did Aubrey replace the covering on the corpse, and withdrew with a light step from the room, closing the door softly, as though he feared to disturb the dead ; and when he regained his own apartment, he sat down thoughtfully by the window, and speculated as to what might be the strange and unhappy destiny of the inhabitants of that house, especially of the beautiful Magdalen, the sister of the deceased youth, for that he seemed intuitively convinced must have been the bond of relationship between them.

Meantime the fury of the storm had somewhat lulled, the wind no longer raved round the house, but sunk into a low melancholy wailing, though the snow still continued its noiseless fall. Thus it was that, in the silence and his utter abstraction, the harsh sound of creaking bolts met the ears of Aubrey Conyers. This sound appeared to proceed from the garden, and at the same time a red beam of light flashed upwards through the old curtain which was drawn across the casement in Aubrey's room ; this light he would not perhaps have noticed, but that his chamber was partially dark from the circumstance of his having placed his candle in the fire-place. From an impulse of curiosity, not unnatural, Conyers was anxious to discover who were the persons moving in the garden, and screening himself against the wall of the chamber he cautiously drew aside the curtain. The snow had almost

ceased falling, but as it thickly covered the ground, it threw into relief the figures of the boy Giles and his mother, as they moved across the garden; the former bearing in his hand a lanthorn, the strong reflector of which had thrown out the light which had first excited Aubrey's attention. The pair now proceeded towards the boundary wall of the garden, where they unfastened a door. Two men then entered bearing between them the body of a third, who seemed either insensible or dead. The bright lurid light of the lanthorn, as they bore this person directly under the casement at which Conyers was posted, discovered to him the slender form and pale features of a young man, whose elegant and fashionable attire showed at once that he could scarcely by fair means have been associated with the persons in whose charge Aubrey beheld him. A sickening horror fastened on the heart of the latter at this seeming proof that he was himself at the mercy of a gang of thieves and murderers; then he sought relief in the thought that the insensible person was possibly some unfortunate traveller benighted in the snow-storm, and that it was with a charitable and not an evil intent that these men were bearing him to their dwelling. Something, however, in the caution of their movements, in their truculent, brutal appearance, observable even by the light of the lanthorn, seemed to discourage this more satisfactory judgment; and, abandoning all thoughts of repose, Conyers sat watching anxiously for the first break of day, and listening with a nervous eagerness for any noise in the house. To add also to the unpleasantness of his position, his candle, which had been for some time wavering in the socket, suddenly expired, and though as free as most men from superstitious imaginations, Aubrey found it difficult to resist the freaks of fancy in that almost palpable darkness, with the storm still moaning

without, while within, a poor strip of wainscot alone separated him from the actual presence of death, and he knew not what deed of horror might be even then in perpetration in the remote parts of that dreadful house. Aubrey had heard beneath him the heavy stumbling tread of the two men as they entered the house with their burden, and at the same time he thought he had distinguished a groan; but as the footsteps soon died away at a distance, he concluded that they had borne the insensible person to the kitchen, from which, as it was so very remote from his chamber, it was not likely he would hear any sound.

Aubrey had sat thus in utter darkness for near an hour, the prey of a thousand painful fancies, when the creaking sound of a bolt cautiously withdrawn again met his ears; and a pale stream of light issued from beneath the door of the inner apartment in which lay the deceased youth. The murderers then were at hand, and Aubrey, grasping his pistols, started from his seat, determined to sell his life dearly; but the gentle footstep which he then heard in the adjoining room was evidently that of a female, and the door between the two chambers being cautiously opened, he discovered a foe no more formidable than the beautiful Magdalen. Motioning Aubrey to silence, the young woman stepped forward, she trembled violently, her countenance was ashy pale, and as she placed the lamp which she carried, upon the table, she sunk upon a chair beside it, as if for the moment incapable of further exertion or even of speech. Aubrey, apprehending that she would faint, offered her some water from a cup that stood on the wash-stand, she swallowed it eagerly, and then clasping her hands, she murmured mysteriously, "I thank heaven, thank heaven, sir, you have not ventured to bed. I was in hopes of this; I thought you would have some suspi-

cion what bad people inhabit this house. But we have not a moment to lose ; oh, sir, if you would save the life of another person, oh come with me at once !”

While resuming his mantle and cap, Aubrey endeavoured to question the young woman as to the person whom he had seen borne into the house ; but she seemed incapable, in her hurry and distress, of giving any direct detail, however brief.

“ Yes !” she said, with an hysterical sob, “ it was he, the perfidious, ungrateful monsters ; oh, sir, make haste or we shall not be able to save him even now ; they are dreadful people, my uncle and aunt. I have had a very unhappy lot, but I never knew till to-night—no, not till to-night—how very very bad they were ; I will tell you all, sir, when we are safe away, but come now, for pity’s sake do not lose a moment !”

As Conyers was now ready to depart ; the young woman took the candle, and led the way through the inner room ; there she paused for a moment, and drawing the sheet from the face of the corpse she passionately pressed her lips to the cold brow, exclaiming amid her sobs, “ Oh my boy, my darling, my poor brother, my dear dear Edwin, have I suffered so much for you, and must I leave you thus ! not even to be laid with a prayer in holy ground ; oh, they say that Heaven is just, but mine has been a hard hard lot.” Those last words, with their rebellious murmuring, were breathed by Magdalen in a bitter tone, as, again folding the sheet over the face of the corpse, she moved from the bier, casting her fine eyes upwards with a frenzied glare, as if she would indeed have reproached the heavens themselves with the bitterness of her lot. Then with a stern self-command, she assumed at least an outward composure, and gently opening the door which had resisted Aubrey’s efforts, she discovered a steep, narrow staircase, and turning to the young officer she said, in a more collected

manner than she had just shown, "It is in a service of some danger, sir, that I venture to enlist your humanity and courage; the life of the gentleman whom you saw borne into this house, was threatened by my uncle and cousins. I have known, alas, for some time past that they were not honest, but, heaven help me, it is to-night only I have learned that they will not even stop at the most dreadful crimes. I have bolted them in the cellar where they hide their ill-gotten gains, and the door is too strong for them to force, but early in the morning some of their companions will be here, who will be sure to set them free, and in their rage I know they will murder me, too, if I am in the house. The service I seek of you, sir, is to allow this poor gentleman who has been wounded by those wretches, the use of your horse; the snow-storm has abated, and I know a path through the hills, which will in less than three miles take us to the town of A——. Oh, sir, you will not refuse me this favour; to go there with me and this wounded gentleman, the more so that I tell you, though your life may be safe in this house, your property is not." It required no such selfish plea as the last, to enlist the sympathies of Aubrey Conyers, and he only besought the young woman to lose no further time, but at once to conduct him to the place where she had left the wounded person. There was something painfully interesting about this hapless creature, the ease of whose diction, no less than the natural elegance of whose manner, seemed to lift her far above the mean position of her connexions, while her ingenuous and noble countenance belied the possibility of her being associated with their crimes; and despite the strange horror and excitement of the moment, Aubrey, as he followed in her light but hasty footsteps, found himself speculating as to the evil destiny which had involved so beautiful and gifted

a person in circumstances so dreadful, and he was possessed with an ardent desire to know the particulars of her history. A long winding passage at the foot of the stairs led Conyers and his guide into the kitchen where he had supped. There the remains of a fresh repast were scattered on the table, but the candles were burning low in their sockets, and the huge fire crumbling in white ashes on the hearth. Before the fire, and stretched on a blanket, was the stranger whom Conyers had seen borne into the house ; with some effort apparently, he raised himself on his elbow as Magdalen and her companion entered the room, and Conyers then perceived that a white handkerchief bound round his temples was deeply stained with blood. The age of this person might have been about five or six and twenty ; his features, of the aquiline cast, were almost too delicately moulded for a man, and his fair complexion, and long curls of pale brown hair, increased a certain effeminacy of appearance, which was by no means corrected by the slender proportions of a figure that scarcely reached the middle height.

“How long you have been !” said this person in a fretful tone to Magdalen, as she approached him ; she was hastening to excuse herself with a humbleness of manner of which Conyers would have supposed her incapable, when a rumbling noise was heard below the apartment, followed by a volley of oaths and execrations. Magdalen, in an apparent agony of apprehension, sunk on her knees beside the stranger, whom she was assisting to rise ; and he, with a careless laugh, that spoke highly for his courage under such critical circumstances, said, “I hope, my pretty Magdalen, that door of the cellar in which you have secured your amiable relations is as strong as you suppose it to be, for even with the aid of this gentleman,” and here the speaker made a slight inclination towards

Aubrey, "I doubt whether the odds would not be rather against me in another contest with them!"

"Oh, the door is secure enough, it is safe lined with iron," answered Magdalen; "but my uncle's dreadful companions will be here in another hour, and they will release him and his family, so that we have no time to lose; and if you think you are enough recovered to bear the exertion, this kind gentleman has promised me the use of his horse, and he and I can walk beside you; it is little more than two miles and a half from here to A—."

These words were uttered by Magdalen in so subdued a tone, with her eyes now cast downwards, and anon timidly raised to the face of the stranger, that Conyers must have been miserably destitute of penetration had he not surmised that an emotion more tender than that of common humanity influenced the conduct of Magdalen. As to the wounded person, his manner of accepting the loan of Aubrey's horse, and his assistance in leaving the house, for he was unable to walk without help, had so much the air of one rather bestowing than receiving a favour, that under circumstances less critical Aubrey would have felt offended by it. Fortunately, by the time they were ready for departure, the snow-storm had not only ceased, but the moon, partially breaking through a rift of clouds, promised to light them on their way. The horrible execrations and turbulent efforts of the people of the house to break from the cellar in which Magdalen had confined them, still smote the ears of the fugitives as they closed behind them the door of the dwelling; and when, seated on Aubrey's horse, the stranger beheld him and the young woman preparing to walk beside it through the snow, he appeared struck with a sense of his selfishness, and muttered something about his suffering and weakness from the

wound on his head. This apology the frank and generous Conyers instantly interrupted; and Magdalen, when the stranger deprecated the fatigue which she must endure in walking, turned on him the liquid lustre of her large eyes, and murmured softly, "Ah, dearest Marsland, name not any fatigue I may encounter for your sake; what danger have you not risked for mine!"

CHAPTER III.

"Our youthful summer yet we see,
Dance by on wings of game and glee,
While the dark storm reserves its rage,
Against the winter of our age."

SCOTT,

THE much complained of variable nature of the English climate may be found, perhaps, on calculation at the end of the year, to afford as large a number of fair and pleasant days as the inhabitants of any country can boast of; and these fair days interposing between very gloomy ones, are all the more valuable and agreeable. On the morning after the snow-storm, though October was so near its close, the sun rose with beams as vigorous and cheering as any that had glowed on our western isle a month before; quickly melting away the snows on the banks of streams and on the level ground, while on the ledges of rocks, and among the dark verdure of pines and arbutus, it still rested in masses of dazzling whiteness. Drooping nature seemed to revive under the influence of those sunbeams, and nowhere did they produce more gorgeous effects of rich colouring, of light and shade, than among the wild beauties of the ancient domain of the Musgraves of Ravenglas.

Situated at the northern extremity of Cumberland, the wide estate of Ravenglas comprehended in itself specimens of all that is awe-inspiring or beautiful in the county. The broad smooth lake, the rushing torrent, the hills bleak and

barren, or crowned with solemn woods, the lonely sheep-walk, and the valley rich with its treasure of corn; though in this last characteristic of fertility, Ravenglas was, indeed, less favoured than the contiguous barony of Allerdale. From time immemorial, the most friendly relations had existed between the Musgraves of Ravenglas and the lords of Allerdale; and these relations, it was whispered, were at the present time about to be cemented by the marriage of the niece and heiress of the proprietor of Ravenglas with the eldest son of Lord Allerdale. Though known to be not altogether immaculate—as far as the follies, or perhaps even some of the vices, of fashionable life are concerned—the handsome person, captivating manners, and though last, probably not least, the brilliant position, both present and future, of the Honourable Edmund Conyers, the heir of Allerdale, led many a fair lady of the “*North Countree*” to envy the destiny of Ellinor Musgrave; much then would more than one thoughtless damsel have marvelled, had they beheld the grave and even mournful countenance with which, on that particular morning to which we allude, Ellinor issued from the proud and ancient halls of her uncle, and bent her solitary steps towards the beautiful lake from which the estate derived its name. But Ellinor, an orphan since she was six years of age, and brought up under the sole care of her uncle, a man of weak health, deep learning, and nervous susceptibility, had come to consider the world’s real ills, to reflect and exercise a sober judgment, as much as many of her sex who were daily enduring the hard struggle for bread, while she fed delicately, and slept on down. The decision and habits of thought, however, which so widely distinguished the character of Ellinor from the usual frivolity of her sex, though originally the gift of nature, had been ripened and called into action by the peculiar circumstances in which she had been

placed ; for her uncle, Richard Musgrave, was at once one of the most amiable and least energetic of human beings. A person slightly deformed, and severe fits of illness, had doubtless contributed to induce Richard Musgrave with that spirit of morbid melancholy which rendered him the very antipodes of the hearty, hospitable, north-country squires of the neighbourhood. They, the squires, would even have disliked him for his book-learning and solitary habits of life, but that the gentle temper of Richard, his ready kindness, ever prompt to alleviate the troubles, or aid in the enjoyment of his neighbours, charmed the rough sportsmen in spite of themselves. Richard Musgrave could not join them in the chase, it is true, but if sickness had made the strong man as feeble as a girl, then would Richard Musgrave come and sit by the sick couch, and wile away the weary hours with the countless anecdotes with which his memory was stored ; or if a christening or a wedding were the point in question, perhaps the timid nervous owner of Ravenglas, painfully susceptible on the score of his personal misfortune, would decline to mingle in the gay circle, but never failed to send some substantial token of his friendly interest in the baby or the bride. So the ladies and gentlemen of Cumberland always spoke of the proprietor of Ravenglas as "that dear Richard Musgrave," or "poor Richard Musgrave," &c. ; the latter—the gentlemen—would sometimes, when over their wine, add what would have been heresy in the hearing of their wives, that "it was a pity, after all, that poor Richard ever was born, or that he did not die when he was a child, so that his brother—that fine fellow Leonard—might have come into the estate, instead of going out with his regiment to die on the burning plains of India, where he was suffered to perish, forsooth, because his wife, the beautiful Lady Geraldine, the penniless daughter of an earl, had naturally preferred him

with his manly beauty and his poverty to his elder brother's deformed person and his great estate." Oh! the world, the heartless, thoughtless, selfish, ungrateful world! Leonard Musgrave was certainly what this world calls a fine fellow, a gay dashing spirit, who ran through his course with so free and generous an air, that its selfishness was either not perceived, or forgiven perhaps for its very audacity. And the lovely but weak-minded woman who was captivated by that dashing handsome Leonard Musgrave, and the poor deformed elder brother who stood between the handsome profligate and the rich estate—oh, if the world could have known what tears of blood—blood from the heart's core, those two, the brother and the wife, had wept! But the world was just and candid after its fashion; it did call Richard generous and kind, when his brother died, as it was said, in India, and the widowed Lady Geraldine pined away, and left a little daughter, three years old, to the kindness of her only near relation, Richard Musgrave—it did call him good and generous, all things considered, that he supplied so well the place of a father to the orphan Ellinor. That poor uncle with the deformed body and the beautiful soul—he was more to that child than ever her own father would have been; and that was the least of his virtues! Oh, what wonder that Ellinor loved him so tenderly, so entirely, that pausing in her melancholy walk she turned to look at the fine old mansion, with its huge but not ungraceful proportions, its crumbling walls, and diamond-paned casements, overgrown with ivy and with moss, and the dark hills crowned with woods rising behind it, —and the broad waters of the lake, with the red-deer reclining on its margin; spreading far in the foreground, the rich prospect of the fertile valley below, the park stretching farther than the eye could reach; oh, what wonder was it

that the high-minded and enthusiastic girl, forgetting in that moment her indifference to the heir of Lord Allerdale, almost determined to purchase, by a union with him, her beloved uncle's tenure of his fair ancestral domain. The homely and bitter adage that "there is a skeleton in every house," was unfortunately quite applicable to the proprietor of Ravenglas; but neither the gentry nor the common inhabitants of the neighbourhood were by any means aware that the lands were deeply mortgaged; had this fact been generally known, it would have afforded to the envious and curious a very delicious treat, since it would have been hard for Scandal's self to have surmised the cause. The rental of the estate was large, and it had certainly come unembarrassed into the possession of Mr. Richard Musgrave; the gentleman was certainly not a gambler, or a person of otherwise dissolute habits; and his literary and sedentary pursuits, combined with his weak health, prevented his even incurring the expense attendant on the perhaps too liberal hospitality in which country squires are apt to indulge; while the generosity of his disposition had not been by any means carried to that imprudent excess which would have embarrassed his affairs. There was another secret, too, in connexion with Mr. Musgrave, which, happily for him, remained such; it was known to his household generally, and even in the neighbourhood, that he sometimes suffered from violent fits,—but it was not known, save to one old and faithful servant, and latterly to his niece, Ellinor, that those cruel attacks were preceded, and, indeed, superinduced by a dreadful agony of mind, the unfading memory of a "rooted sorrow, the written troubles of the brain." Oh, the great physician has not been found whose skill "can minister to the mind diseased," and heaven and his own heart were alone cognizant of the source of those sorrows which

weighed so heavily on Richard Musgrave. Since the time of her emancipation from the studies of the schoolroom, Ellinor had been the almost constant companion of her uncle ; and but that his feminine tenderness of heart, his known upright and honourable character, shamed and belied such a supposition, she might have supposed that he was agitated, not only by sorrow, but by remorse. For what, save the knowledge of some secret sin, or a disorder of mind bordering on absolute insanity, could account for the wild air with which, in what seemed the calmest moments of Mr. Musgrave, he would start from conversation, or even from his books, and bury himself in the solitude of his chamber, or wander alone for hours among the wild glens or mountains, returning to his home only when physical fatigue had quite worn out his feeble frame. Affection, too, has prying eyes no less than malice, and Ellinor had observed, that any allusion to the period of his youth, or to her parents, seemed to give the most acute pain to her uncle, and that he would hurriedly waive the subject. Especially had Ellinor observed that expression of anguish cross the features of her uncle, if the name of Lady Geraldine were abruptly mentioned ; she knew, indeed, that Richard Musgrave had loved her mother ; that it was upon him, as the heir of Ravenglas, that her proud but needy relatives had wished to bestow her hand ; but she also knew that on that trying occasion her uncle had shown himself the least selfish and most generous of men, that keen as had been his anguish when he learned that the handsome person and brilliant manners of his brother had seduced the heart of his betrothed, when he learned also that the lady was devotedly beloved by Leonard, he nobly stifled his own luckless passion, and by a voluntary contract never himself to marry, obtained the consent of Lady Geraldine's father to her

union with Leonard. The unhappy lady, it is true, lived perhaps to wish that Richard Musgrave had been less generous; for neither her beauty nor virtues availed to wean the father of Ellinor from the dissolute habits which broke his wife's heart, and brought himself to a premature grave. But in all these painful circumstances, Ellinor was aware her uncle had been more than blameless, and there seemed nothing in the recollection of such a past to cause the strange suffering he endured. There were times when he would shudder and grow pale at a sound, or fix his eyes on vacancy, as though some spectre were at his side. These fits of abstraction and distress had increased with Mr. Musgrave of late; very possibly they were aggravated by his pecuniary embarrassments, of which he had been in some measure compelled to make Ellinor a confidante. To so great an extent, too, had these embarrassments lately arrived, that Mr. Musgrave had been compelled to contemplate the necessity of discontinuing his residence at Ravenglas, and seeking a humbler habitation. This abandonment of his paternal seat was regarded by Mr. Musgrave with a kind of horror mingled with his grief, for which Ellinor could not account. It should be observed, that of all his neighbours, Lord Allerdale was alone cognizant of Mr. Musgrave's embarrassments; when therefore he offered, could a matrimonial alliance be accomplished between Ellinor and his eldest son, to pay off the mortgage on Ravenglas, it was no marvel that, seeing in Mr. Conyers a young man whose person, manners, and position might well have recommended him to a lady in the most advantageous circumstances, Mr. Musgrave should eagerly urge upon his niece the acceptance of his hand. Ellinor had not the heart to refuse her uncle, and she was fully sensible of the generosity of Lord Allerdale's proposal; and though her

indifference to Edmund Conyers touched the very boundaries of an absolute dislike, founded on his levity of manners, and what she believed to be the coldness of his heart, yet she suffered the arrangements for the marriage to proceed, happy in the thought of relieving the embarrassments of her beloved uncle, grateful to Lord Allerdale, and resigned in the thought that Edmund Conyers was not probably more heartless or selfish than other young men of his class ; and that if her union with him promised not to fulfil all the longings of her heart, or dreams of her imagination, it would at least be free from the excruciating pangs which mingle with the luxury of real and passionate love. Edmund Conyers, on his part, was no less indifferent than the lady, whom he was content to marry because she was beautiful and accomplished, of unimpeachable descent, and the heiress of an estate, which for some generations past his family had been bewitched with the fancy of adding to the lordship of Allerdale. This covetous eye which the race of Conyers, of Allerdale, had cast upon the property of their neighbours, had indeed led to a law-suit between the fathers of the present lord and of Mr. Richard Conyers ; and as the present Lord Allerdale, then only a younger son, had been also an unsuccessful suitor for the hand of the beautiful Lady Geraldine, and there had been high words between him and Leonard Musgrave, the dear world, that loves to have something at which to wonder and admire, wondered and admired very much at Lord Allerdale's generosity in proposing the alliance between Ellinor and his son.

As for Ellinor, there were times when the indifference which was her hope somewhat failed her, and her soul would turn to the delicious visions which she had once formed of wedded happiness, and then the future would grow very dark,

for never, never, she felt, could such visions be realized by the wife of Edmund Conyers. It was to escape from such thoughts, to forget herself and her actual position, if possible, for awhile, that she left the mansion-house for that early morning walk. Ellinor had appointed that day, too, for the visit to Ravensglas of the only dear female friend she had, Rose Arlington, the daughter of the curate of the neighbouring village church of Allerdale; and as she knew that Rose always walked through the park, and by the banks of the lake, she turned her own steps thither, in the expectation of meeting her friend.

There could scarce be a lovelier walk than that through the park and by the lake of Ravensglas to Allerdale; and though the season was so far advanced that the elm, the beech, and oak, were almost entirely stripped of their leaves, yet the abundance of larch and pine, and thickets of holly and arbutus, still gave a cheeriness to the scene, especially as it was now lighted up by a bright though transient sunbeam. Ellinor paused as she approached the lake, and again looked back at the stately moss-grown halls of her ancestors. Conspicuous amidst the mass of buildings which composed that old castellated mansion was one hoary, ivy-crowned tower, famous as the citadel which a valiant dame, Agnes Musgrave, had held against the troops of the Parliament, till Prince Rupert himself sent relief. This tower, though ever after held in high veneration by the Musgraves, had been abandoned as a residence, till the marriage of Lady Geraldine, Ellinor's mother, and she expressing great admiration of the prospect from its windows, it had been refitted with modern furniture, and devoted to her use and that of her husband, whenever they were sojourning at Ravensglas. When her establishment in London was broken up by the reckless ex-

travagance of Leonard, the "Agnes Tower" of Ravensglas, as it was called, received the desolate Lady Geraldine, and there, after the exile of her husband, she lingered out two years of an existence, the bitterness of which not all the fraternal tenderness of Richard Musgrave could sooth.

At the moment when Ellinor turned to look back at the mansion, a bright ray of the sun fell full upon the "Agnes Tower;" it had been deserted since her mother's death, for the morbid melancholy of Richard Musgrave's disposition would not permit him to inhabit the apartments in which had been spent the last moments of one, for whose sake he had in vain made the greatest self-sacrifice of which the human heart is capable. A fuller sense than usual even of the magnitude of her uncle's generosity now seemed to strike on the heart of Ellinor, as she gazed on the "Agnes Tower," and thought of all that he had suffered and done for her mother's sake; and though she felt her indifference to the marriage with Edmund Conyers gradually strengthening into repugnance, she murmured, "Ah, my dear uncle, my more than father, it is indeed meet that the daughter should make you some amends for what you suffered for the mother's sake. But I will force myself to love Edmund Conyers!" Unconsciously, in the enthusiasm of the moment, Ellinor had spoken aloud, but she started in terror, as to who might have been her hearer, when the next moment she felt a light hand laid upon her shoulder.

In turning round, Ellinor beheld a person no more formidable than her friend, Rose Arlington, but even to that trusted friend she had never whispered the secret of her indifference to her affianced husband; and she now stood, with her eyes cast down and her cheek flushed, conscious that she must appear sordid and worldly-minded in the estimation of

Rose. The embarrassment of the two maidens was for the moment mutual, but Rose was the first to overcome it.

"Dear Ellinor!" she said, as they paced slowly together by the banks of the lake, "do not forbid me to speak to you of what, without any intention to pry into the secrets of your heart, I have just overheard."

"And what would you say, Rose, were I to discuss with you a subject so unpleasant?" answered Ellinor, who had now recovered her self-possession.

"I would tell you, dear Ellinor," replied Rose, "that I have learned but little from what you just said—that even my poor penetration long since discovered that you did not, could not, love that selfish, frivolous Mr. Conyers; and that I know, too, that you have not that cold disposition which promises a life of indifference. There may be some women, senseless and soulless, who can pass through life and never love; but with your brilliant imagination, your warm and generous heart, to love is necessary to your existence; and think, dearest Ellinor, how dreadful if, after you have become the wife of Mr. Edmund Conyers, you should meet the person whom you can love!"

There could not have been a more charming contrast than the two girls presented at that moment. Both exquisitely fair, there was yet a great dissimilarity in their complexions, that of Ellinor having the smoothness and whiteness of marble, but partially enlivened by the faintest possible flush upon the cheek, and by the exceeding lustre of a pair of large soft hazel eyes; while hair of the darkest shade of brown laid smooth across the brow, heightened the pensive Madonnalike cast of the features. The fresh pink and white of Rose Arlington's complexion, on the other hand, was like nothing so much as the beautiful sweet pea, which is called

"the painted lady ;" her blue eyes, more resembling the sapphire than the violet, were perfectly limpid in their brightness ; while the slightly *retroussée* nose gave piquancy to a face round which clustered an abundance of the brightest golden hair.

A smile somewhat melancholy crossed the lips of Ellinor at the enthusiastic manner of her friend. "I should not have thought, dear Rose," she said, "that you had considered these matters so deeply ; or that Mr. Edmund Conyers stood so low in your estimation."

"Ah, Ellinor !" said the young girl, "while you suffered me to suppose that you willingly would become the wife of Mr. Edmund Conyers, I was dumb as to my knowledge of his character ; but oh ! Ellinor, I will tell you now that not even the sacred profession of my father has secured him from the aristocratic insolence of that young man. I will not shock your ears, or stain my own lips, by repeating the tales I have heard of his heartless libertinism. Were he like his brother, poor Mr. Francis, who is so amiable, and whom every body loves, then Ellinor, then ——"

"And what then ?" said Ellinor, archly ; "would my friend Rose recommend me to marry him ?"

A deeper tint than usual overspread the features of Rose at this query, but after a moment's hesitation, she answered firmly, "Certainly, Ellinor, I would, for I believe him to be truly amiable."

"I hope you feel in your heart that you could and would so advise me, Rose !" answered Ellinor, "for I have feared that you suffered yourself to think Mr. Francis only *too* amiable."

Rose was about eagerly to repel this charge, when the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the very

gentleman of whom she and her friend were speaking. It was no wonder that the simple daughter of a village curate had been charmed by the manners of Mr. Francis Conyers, which, full of amenity towards the lowest person on his father's estates, had been particularly gracious with the curate and his family; and when to this kind manner was added the attraction of a very handsome face and person, he became, as Ellinor feared, somewhat dangerous to the peace of poor Rose.

Ellinor, however, forgot her apprehensions for her friend in the communication which she received from Francis Conyers, namely, that he and Lord Allerdale, having been greatly alarmed by the non-appearance of Edmund at home during the past night, he, Francis, had ridden over to learn if his brother had been at Ravenglas: and that having been told that Miss Musgrave was walking by the lake, he had come down to meet her, as her uncle was closeted with his solicitor, Mr. Nicholas Benedict, who had just arrived from London. It was this last intelligence, and not the absence of her lover, which so discomposed Ellinor that, walking hurriedly towards the house, she left Francis Conyers and Rose, to a *tête-à-tête* that was dangerous to one of them, and agreeable to both.

CHAPTER IV.

"Oh, I do know a tale,
Of one who loved. She was of humble birth
Yet dared to love a proud and noble youth.
————— Glory blazed
Around his path, yet did he smile on her.
Oh, then what visions were that blessed one's !"

BERTRAM.

EXHAUSTED with cold and fatigue, but without having encountered any of the vile gang connected with Harris, the man who was master of the pretended inn, the Wheat Sheaf, Aubrey Conyers and his companions, about six o'clock in the morning, reached the town of A——. The extreme cold, added to the motion of the horse, operated so unfavourably on the wound in the head which the young man, Marsland, had received, and he complained so much of the pain he suffered, that he considerably delayed the progress of his fellow travellers, even though they journeyed on foot. On arriving at A——, Marsland retired to a chamber, and the medical practitioner of the little town being sent for, dressed the wound, which, in consequence of the great effusion of blood, he pronounced to be more unpleasant than dangerous. A motive of mere humanity would alone have induced Conyers to wait at the inn for the report of the surgeon ; but before the arrival of the latter, Mr. Marsland had requested that Conyers would favour him with a few minutes' private interview, so soon as the wound was dressed, the extreme pain of which, at the time, precluded his entering into any conversation. Conyers accordingly ordered breakfast, and

while he was engaged in taking his repast, the young woman, Magdalen, entered the apartment. The natural and graceful dignity of her manner had somewhat failed her, and there was a kind of confusion in her looks, as with downcast eyes she said that she came to bid Conyers farewell, as a post-chaise was then waiting at the door to convey her to Carlisle, whence she should depart for London, where a good friend had secured for her a safe and respectable asylum. As Magdalen uttered the last words, she raised her eyes timidly to the gaze of Conyers, and possibly read there the sorrowful apprehension which he felt with regard to the fate of a young woman whose exceeding beauty would be only an aggravation of the mysterious and unfortunate circumstances in which she seemed placed. An expression of wounded pride immediately sparkled in her eyes, and flushed her fine features ; and she said, "I am sorry, sir, that a gentleman, such as I am sure you are, should for a moment suppose me either weak or wicked. It is not long that the roof under which you found me last night has been my shelter ; nor when my poor brother and I were left orphans by the death of our mother, six months ago, did I suspect the protection which my uncle Harris offered was such as we ought not to have received, for though poor we have always been honest, and my dear mother was a very different person to her brother and his wife. But let them be what they may, I have eaten their bread, and you, sir, they neither injured nor intended to injure ; any harm they meant last night was for the gentleman, Mr. Marsland, and perhaps with regard to him, they had some provocation, though he was not to blame. But since it is unlikely that you and I, sir, will ever meet again, and it was I that said such hard things to you of my aunt and uncle, I hope you will not think of

carrying matters out against them, or of sending officers or any such people to the house : I was angry last night, and they have made me very unhappy of late, but perhaps they are more to be pitied than blamed, for my uncle was better off once, but was unfortunate in his business ; but Mr. Marsland will see you presently, and he has no wish to punish them. He is so generous, so good !”

The evident anxiety of Magdalen to excuse and screen the people whom she had only a few hours before charged with an intention to murder Marsland, and the very tones of her voice when she extolled the latter individual, convinced Conyers that he was the person who had provided for her the asylum of which she spoke, and that the magnanimity with which he pardoned their attack upon his life had a motive which was not creditable. The position, too, in which she was placed would have justified Conyers in assuming that Magdalen was a very vile and worthless creature ; but there was such an air of nobleness and modesty about the young woman, that he would not abandon the idea that, however deluded, she was still pure of heart ; and the pity which he felt for her so much increased with this thought, that he ventured an inquiry as to the position of the friend on whom she seemed so firmly to rely.

“It would be to forfeit a confidence most generously bestowed, sir, were I to say more of the friend who aids me in this worst extremity of a life which, though I am so young, has been very wretched, than that all the accumulated vice through which I have suffered, is outweighed by the virtues of that one friend. But you will excuse me, sir ; I must set out at once for Carlisle, nor should I have troubled you, but to thank you for your kindness of last night, and beg of you to forget what, in the midst of a distress the causes

of which I cannot explain, I said to you respecting my unhappy relations."

The young woman quitted the apartment with these words, and the apprehension of Conyers that Marsland was the friend to whom she alluded with so entire a confidence did not lessen the pity and fears which he felt for her. A few minutes only after the departure of Magdalen a waiter entered to beg that Conyers would do the wounded gentleman the favour of visiting his apartment. Marsland was in bed; his face was very pale, and a surgical bandage bound his temples, but he was more free from pain than he had been for some hours, and Conyers fancied that the supercilious expression of his effeminately handsome features was more strongly marked.

"Really, my good sir," said Marsland, with that air of disdainful courtesy which had repulsed Conyers on their first introduction, "I cannot endure the obligations with which you have already loaded me, much less ask for their extension, as I acknowledge I am about to do, till I learn the name of the gentleman by whose courtesy I have been so much favoured. If I mistake not, I have the honour of speaking to one of the officers of her Majesty? I think I remember seeing you at a county ball some weeks back."

The last words, however, were uttered with an air, as if the speaker thought that he was the party bestowing an honour, in condescending to speak with the individual before him. To the direct question, however, Aubrey, who was keenly sensitive of Marsland's supercilious manner, answered by bowing with a reserved air, and handing his card in silence. The young man took it, and as he read the name, a slight flush mounted to his pale face, and he bit his lip as if surprised, or vexed. "Ah!" he then ejaculated, with rather

an awkward attempt to laugh, "I must lay aside my masquerade, I fear. It would not be fair towards a gentleman, who may positively be a cousin of my own."

The civil sneer returned again with the last words, and the speaker, drawing a pocket-book from beneath his pillow, handed to Aubrey a card, on which was engraven the name of the "HONOURABLE EDMUND CONYERS !"

"The heir of Lord Allerdale, I presume?" said Aubrey, as he read the card.

"Who only feels at this moment, my dear sir," returned Edmund, "from the aches and pains which invade every joint in his body, that he is a veritable heir of Adam." Then he added, with an air of vivacity, which seemed to maintain a perpetual contest with his pride, "But my good cousin—I am certain, Lieutenant Conyers, that you must be a cousin, for it is droll to observe how you resemble the picture of a grim Sir Marmaduke, an old cavalier ancestor of their lordships of Allerdale ; ah ! you must see that picture ; I will show it you when these infernal cuts and bruises are healed. But in the interim, I must candidly throw myself on your new-born friendship, or our new-found relationship, and pray that you will do me the friendly or cousinly kindness to ride over to Allerdale, and introduce yourself to my sage papa, and tell them to send my man, Mons. Bertrand, here, and say you must speak to Bertrand yourself, and do me the favour to give him a hint that the *canaille*, the horrible rustics, into whose hands I was fool enough to commit myself last night, have finished me up, robbed me of my last sovereign, left me without even a ring or a watch to pawn for my reckoning, like the monarch of merry memories. And tell them,—I mean my father and Bertrand,—that a coxcomb of a country apothecary has said that I must keep quiet, but that I should

treat his absurd orders with contempt, if I could possibly hold my head up, or get out of my bed !”

“If the medical man has ordered you to keep quiet, Mr. Conyers,” said Aubrey, who could not forbear smiling at the young man’s volubility, “I think you may be quite satisfied with the amount of contempt you are at this moment evincing for his orders. Do follow his advice ; that is an ugly cut on your head ; lie down, and try to sleep. I have no military business for to-day, and will, with pleasure, convey any message for you to your friends.”

“As to being quiet—silent, that is to say—it is no more in my nature than in a woman’s,” answered Edmund. “Besides, I must give you your instructions. And to begin, oh valiant son of Mars, I suppose it is scarce necessary to caution so gallant-looking a member of your gallant profession, that the little *escapade*, the masquerading, the incognito of Mr. Marsland, need not be named to the ears sedate of the Baron of Allerdale. Oh, don’t affect to look severe and shocked, for that makes you resemble Sir Marmaduke more horribly than ever ; and to my mind, I can tell you, the discovery of that resemblance is no compliment, for never was there such a savage Spanish-looking hero, as that cavalier ; not Don Juan mind, but the commandant Pedro, or some other ill-used husband or papa, or ‘Edgar Ravenswood,’ or the ‘Corsair,’ or the ‘Giaour,’ or any of those knights of tempest and blood, of whom the women, confound them for their bad taste, are so fond !”

“There is no accounting for taste, you know,” replied Aubrey, “and, if I mistake not, you may have found maids and matrons of both high and low degree, whose taste you would by no means impugn !”

“Certainly not !” returned Edmund, with the tone of a most insensible barbarous tyrant over the female heart.

"But no ungentlemanly inuendoes, I pray you, Mr. Conyers; do not go, after the manner of the wicked, and above all, of your scandalous profession, to measure the hearts of other men by your own: no insinuations, I beg, respecting the fair Magdalen, for whom I avow a most pure and disinterested friendship, though I should scarce introduce her to the house of my father. Is she not beautiful though?"

This last question, though the honourable Mr. Conyers had commenced speaking in a light, gibing tone, was addressed very seriously to Aubrey, and with a quick, penetrating, and almost angry glance of the eye, as if the speaker would have ascertained how far Aubrey had been impressed by the beauty of Magdalen. The grave air, however, with which he replied, must have disarmed any jealousy, if such there were, on the part of Edmund.

"She is indeed very beautiful, but she appears to belong to that humble class to whom beauty is the most fatal of misfortunes."

"Not always," returned Edmund, in a tone more serious than he had yet used; "and allow me to tell you, Mr. Conyers, very seriously, that Magdalen is well provided for, and that I do only regard her as a friend. Poor girl, she has been most unhappily situated, and thrown among the vilest of wretches without any fault of her own. Besides!"—and with that word Edmund Conyers resumed his bitter sneering tone and look, "how could I make love, even for pastime, to poor Magdalen, when my sage papa is so busy in arranging for my marriage with the beautiful Miss Musgrave, whose name you have doubtless heard."

There was nothing in the words used by Edmund Conyers that would have justified Aubrey in asserting that he did passionately love the beautiful Magdalen, and was perfectly

indifferent towards the lady whom he was to marry ; yet both facts were so strongly implied by his manner, that Aubrey remained silent under a kind of confused sense of the hypocrisy or misfortune of his new acquaintance. Edmund also kept silence, as if meditating for a few moments ; then he resumed abruptly. "By the by, my dear fellow, on the whole, perhaps it would be better for you to go to Mr. Musgrave, at Ravenglas, for me, instead of to Allerdale ; poor old Musgrave is always in a good humour, and my noble papa is sometimes in a very bad one. So you will go to Ravenglas, it is not a mile from Allerdale, and tell Mr. and Miss Musgrave from me, that I should have seen them last night, but that I have had a bad fall from my horse, which ran away, I don't know where. I did fall from my horse, you will observe, and you found me insensible and with great humanity brought me to this inn. You did bring me here—I am not coining untruths for you, Mr. Conyers ; but I do expect, on your honour as a gentleman and an officer, that you will not allude to Magdalen, or the scenes at the house where we first really met ; it is not necessary that those matters should be mentioned ; your silence can injure no one, and I entreat it as the greatest favour you can bestow."

The air of earnest and even wounded feeling with which Edmund pronounced the last words so affected Aubrey, that he readily pledged his honour to the required silence : that promise obtained, Edmund resumed his ease and frivolity. "Well now," he said, "I think we have made an excellent arrangement ; it will look so amiable with Ellinor, to send first to Ravenglas ; and Mr. Musgrave will send for Bertrand, to whom you can deliver my message ; and you will have a pleasant day at Ravenglas, and I will introduce you at Allerdale to-morrow, and we shall escape for to-day the

insinuations and pious horror of that sanctified brother of mine. That Frank is such a complete pattern man, that you can imagine no person more disagreeable. What with his new fangled, lack-a-daisical school of politics, and his humanity, and his religion, and his sentiments, he is a perfect bore so absolute a Joseph Surface, that I am sure he has some most extraordinary vices in the background, and the most innocent action I expect from him is the concealment of the French milliner behind a screen. But I think, now, I have nothing more to say, and if you will do me the great favour of going to Ravenglas, I suppose I shall, in spite of myself follow the injunctions of that stupid apothecary, and go to sleep, an effect, no doubt, of the abominable potion which he compelled me to swallow."

The dull, heavy feeling, however, which Mr. Conyer mistook for the forerunner of sleep, was in fact a faintness caused by the exertion of talking, and as he ceased speaking he sunk back on his pillow almost insensible; the medical man was sent for again, and as, on the recovery of his patient he still insisted upon quiet, Aubrey thought that the best mode of securing that necessary point was himself immediately to depart for Ravenglas.

CHAPTER V.

"Ask me not what I think ; the unwilling brain
Feigns often what it would not ; and we trust
Imagination with such fantasies
As the tongue dares not fashion into words ;
Which have no words ; their horror makes them dim
To the mind's eye. My heart denies itself
To think what you demand."

THE CENCI.

THE filial affection of Ellinor for her uncle had inspired her with a very well-grounded fear of the visits of Mr. Nicholas Benedict, for not only did the customary depression of Richard Musgrave's spirits greatly increase after those interviews, but a not unfrequent result of them was one of the fits, which, with each attack, grew more violent and alarming. On reaching the manor-house, Ellinor was informed that Mr. Benedict was closeted, conferring with her uncle in the library, and what was a very unusual occurrence, she was told that her presence there was desired, for Ellinor had not only been kept quite in the dark as to the source of her uncle's embarrassments, but only knew just so much of their extent as it was imperative the heiress of the estates should know. An indefinite apprehension of some event more than usually unpleasant had fastened on her mind, when she was told by Francis Conyers of this unexpected visit of the lawyer ; and in spite of her firmness, it was with a faltering step and throbbing heart that she repaired to the library.

On Ellinor's entrance she found the large table drawn near to the fire, and spread with parchments and law papers,

and her uncle sitting in his easy chair, with his eyes fixed upon those ominous writings, and a most woebegone and despairing look written on his pale, but intellectual features. It was scarcely possible to imagine a more interesting aspect than that of Richard Musgrave; though his person was weakly and deformed, though he was what is called hump-backed, and additionally afflicted with an incurable lameness, his face had in childhood and youth been remarkable for a classical and almost feminine beauty. But the once bright auburn hair had long grown thin, and of a silvery whiteness, the effect of sickness and sorrow more than time; the fine outline of the features was worn, the blue eye had slightly sunk, and the naturally pale complexion was deteriorated by a sallow tint. Still there were times when, in speaking of his beloved studies, which had alone lightened for him the weary yoke of life, or planning a bright future for his still more beloved niece, the mournful countenance of the owner of Ravenglas would become animated, the blue eye would flash with intelligence, or kindly humour, the flush of a momentary happiness would tinge the hollow cheek, and the sweetest and most benevolent of smiles would play round the beautiful chiselled mouth. Such, however, was not now the expression of his features, and as Ellinor noted the blank despair of her uncle's looks, she involuntarily turned her eyes, with an angry glance, upon Mr. Benedict, who had been seated opposite to her uncle, but who had risen with a profound bow on her entrance. If the face of Richard Musgrave, with its well-shaped features and expression of gentle melancholy, was highly prepossessing, that of his legal adviser, Mr. Nicholas Benedict, was the very reverse; and yet his ugliness, for ugly he certainly was, could not be charged upon any particular coarseness or irregularity of

smile, the quick malignity of the grey eye, which though it sometimes rested calmly beneath the rather overhanging brow, was always so bright and cold that it reminded the beholder of polished steel. Mr. Benedict had very fine white teeth; possibly he smiled sometimes to show them, but the smile was a very bad one, and the teeth so large, that Rose Arlington, when a child, had likened them to those of the wolf who had devoured little Red Riding Hood.

Metaphorically speaking, and with the teeth of the law, Mr. Benedict had really devoured many an orphan child, and helpless widow too; but he still smiled—the smile was constant, but of “such a sort,” that it would, upon the stage, have made Mr. Benedict an admirable representative of Mephistopheles. With all this, and though he was a man of low origin, Mr. Benedict, had perfectly the demeanour and manners of a gentleman. For many years past, Mr. Benedict had chosen to assume to himself the style and title of a “solicitor,” in common with the great majority of his fellow attornies, who please themselves with the high sounding title to which they have no claim, since it is not in the Chancery court that they practise.

All the worse it was for the unfortunates who fell into the hands of Mr. Nicholas Benedict, that he was a person not only of gentlemanly manner and appearance, but of great legal acumen, and unquestionable general ability. His talents and his close acquaintance with the law were the very venom in the serpent's fang, for Mr. Benedict was a finished specimen of those dishonest, unprincipled lawyers, who stigmatize with their vices that profession which calls forth all the highest qualities of the most intellectual and honourable of men; for the sword of the law is alike potent

for evil or for good, according to the discretion of those who wield it.

It needs not here to detail what lamentable circumstance it was which threw the affairs of Richard Musgrave into the hands of Mr. Benedict ; it may suffice for the present to say, that at the time when he was first introduced to Mr. Musgrave by the present Lord Allerdale, sixteen years before, he was still a plodding attorney, living with a large family in a suburb of London, and in want, at times, of the mere necessaries of life. Things had altered since then with Mr. Benedict ; he had an elegant house in Eaton Square, and a villa at Wimbledon, and through the interest of Lord Allerdale he enjoyed a first-rate practice, and mingled in the first society.

Mr. Benedict had far too correct a conception of the demeanour of a real gentleman ever to be obtrusive or servile in his politeness ; he was, however, really desirous of ingratiating himself with Ellinor, and after the usual compliments of meeting, he expressed his regret at having found Mr. Musgrave so much indisposed, with an earnestness of manner that might have been mistaken for sincerity.

"It would be well, sir !" answered Ellinor, with a severity of look and tone which might scarce have been expected from so young a person, "if you would show your consideration for my uncle's ill-health by sparing him some of the harassing details of business which I find so surely accompany your visits, that, consulting candour, and my uncle's peace, rather than an affected courtesy, I must tell you that I dread to hear your name announced."

"If it be merely for your uncle's sake that you regard my visits with so much horror, Miss Musgrave," responded the



THE INTERVIEW WITH THE LAWYER.

lawyer, sharply, for in spite of himself he was irritated by the sarcasms of Ellinor, "I trust that in future my name will be less abhorrent to you. Whatever it may please you to think, young lady, I can assure you that it has ever been my most earnest care to spare not only Mr. Musgrave's feelings, but your own, and it is not my fault if the present exigency of his affairs compels me to enter into details with you, which may not, perhaps, prove altogether agreeable. It is due to myself, however, to observe, that I have not been insensible to this unjust aversion of yours, nor shall I deny that I have felt wounded at such a misconception on the part of a young lady whose feelings I have been most anxious to spare, or that your conduct has much lessened the pain I should have otherwise felt at being compelled to make to you the disclosures that are now inevitable."

Young as she was, Ellinor Musgrave had an instinctive knowledge of character, and she had fully understood that of the lawyer; but she wanted the discretion which years can alone bestow, and she enjoyed his irritation at the moment when it should have alarmed her; the smile with which she listened to Mr. Benedict was infinitely provoking. Very different, however, was the effect of the lawyer's last words upon her uncle. Suddenly starting from his fit of melancholy abstraction, he gazed wildly round the room; then his eye fixed on Benedict, and he murmured in a broken voice, "Ah, what does all this mean? disclosures—Benedict, are you mad?—and yet, what disclosures?—What can be disclosed at which we need to fear?—And as for me, have I ever wilfully imagined harm towards any living creature?—you know I have not, Benedict, and those only can fear disclosures who have guilt to be disclosed."

"Which never, never would be your case, my kind good uncle!" said Ellinor, in a voice choked by her tears, as she bent down and kissed the pallid brow of Musgrave; then passing her arm fondly round the neck of the old man, she turned towards the lawyer with something almost of defiance in her aspect, and said in a peremptory tone, "Well, sir, these disclosures—these disclosures, with the name of which you are practising on my uncle's weak nerves!"

"Practising, Miss Musgrave!" said the lawyer, haughtily.

"Yes, sir, practising!" replied Ellinor, impetuously; "your ears serve you well; practising was the word I used. These disclosures with which you threaten, what may they be?"

"It is the peculiar misfortune of men in my profession," answered the lawyer, with a sardonic bitterness of tone, "not only to be constantly misunderstood by the persons whom they seek to serve, but to hear those persons complain of their own misfortunes, as if they were the crime of their legal advisers, rather than the effect of some folly or misdemeanour of their own."

"Misdemeanour! ah, what is that?" cried Richard Musgrave, raising his head from the shoulder of his niece. "My dear friend, my good Benedict, you use strange expressions, to say the least. Misdemeanours! what should this dear child know of them? Besides, what have they to do with the point in question? My dear Benedict, it is not your wont to be uncourteous, especially towards a lady, an innocent girl. If, as you have told me, Ellinor must know the sad state of my affairs, oh, break such ill news to her as gently as possible!"

"The raven is always hoarse, sir, that announces bad tidings," answered the lawyer, bitterly. "I know not the

form of speech which can gracefully inform Miss Musgrave that she is a beggar, and that never was there generosity or charity to equal that of Lord Allerdale, when he selects her as the bride of his son !”

“ But I care not, sir, to be so selected !” returned Ellinor, proudly. “ I care not to be the recipient of a generosity so humiliating. And, if I am indeed the beggar you describe, I am to presume that my dear uncle shares in my destitution, and for his sake I should be glad to know all particulars of our position, and how it is that his noble inheritance has passed away.”

“ As to the actual position of your uncle’s affairs, Miss Musgrave,” replied the lawyer, still with the same sarcastic look and accent, “ I have to inform you, that this very house, with its pictures, furniture, and plate, is mortgaged to its full value ; that the persons who hold the mortgage threaten to foreclose, the only chance of saving the property being in an appeal on your part to your noble and constant friend, Lord Allerdale, who, I believe you are aware, has been for some time past the real possessor of the estates of Ravenglas, allowing the rents, as an artifice of friendship, to pass through your uncle’s hands. As to the primary cause of a state of things which I can well imagine to be humiliating to a young lady of your pride and spirit, I am perfectly willing, with the permission of your uncle, to enlighten you as to its most minute particulars !”

The last words were pronounced by the lawyer with such a concentrated malice of look and tone, that a suspicion, which had for some time past loomed like a ghastly phantom in the mind of Ellinor, grew into fearful distinctness. She feared she knew not what horrible circumstance, as the

CHAPTER VI.

"The best of men have ever loved repose.
They hate to mingle in the filthy fray
Where the soul sours and gradual sourer grows
Embittered more from peevish day to day."

CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

IF the repose of a country life, or the peaceful and elegant pursuits of literature, could sooth a harassed mind, or heal a wounded heart, the sorrows of Mr. Musgrave had not been without consolation. A thought similar to this rose in the mind of Aubrey Conyers, in the course of the to him delightful evening which he passed in the library of Raven-glas; and as he gazed on the mild, melancholy countenance of Mr. Musgrave, and his eyes wandered from that face to the costly tomes which the old man displayed with a simple enthusiasm, he caught himself wondering whether the possessor of so elegant a mind, with wealth that enabled him to indulge his taste in the peculiar path of learning which he had chosen, could know any of the bitter cares of mortality, apart from those which must have been entailed upon him by his personal deformity, a misfortune heavy enough in itself for one man, as Aubrey was compelled to admit.

A servant had been sent to the abode of Mr. Thornthwaite, the gentleman at whose house Aubrey had been visiting, with a letter from Aubrey, detailing as much of his night's adventures as was consistent with his promise to Edmund Conyers. With this letter, too, was delivered a note from Mr. Musgrave, bidding Mr. Thornthwaite, with whom

Richard was well acquainted, resign himself to the loss of his guest for a few days. In reply to these notes the servant brought back a reply, full of friendly badinage, to Mr. Musgrave; and to Aubrey, a letter full of earnest recommendation, not to neglect the opportunity of acquiring the support and friendship of two persons so influential as Musgrave of Ravenglas, and Lord Allerdale. Meantime the party at dinner, and for the greater portion of the evening, was a very pleasant one, consisting of the curate, Mr. Arlington, and his daughter Rose, Francis Conyers, Aubrey, and Mr. and Miss Musgrave; for Mr. Benedict, having business with Lord Allerdale, as well as with the proprietor of Ravenglas, had relieved the company of his disagreeable Mephistopheles face before dinner, and did not return till just as the servants brought the trays for supper into the library. If Aubrey himself felt that he had never passed a more delightful evening, he had contributed much to make it one of enjoyment to others; for he was gifted with extraordinary powers of conversation, far better acquainted with books than the average of young men of his age, and had seen much of active life. It was difficult to find a subject on which he could not speak with ease; with the girls he talked of the tremendous scenes of the Alps and Apennines, and promised to show them some rare botanical specimens which he had collected there; he charmed the curate with his temperate and Christian view of the grave subjects of religion and morals; and quite conquered Mr. Musgrave's heart, when he discovered no contemptible acquaintance with the old gentleman's own favourite study of English antiquities. In this study, Mr. Musgrave had more particularly devoted himself to heraldry and genealogies; and what fine specimens of illuminated genealogies and heraldic works had he

not to show ! How heartily did Ellinor bless the arrival of the guest, who by patiently bearing with her uncle's enthusiasm on his favourite study, drew his thoughts from the subject of Mr. Benedict and his visit ; yet the tears once rose to her eyes, as she watched her uncle displaying with pride his superb copies of Dugdale, both the "Monasticon" and the "Baronage," magnificently bound ; his "Guillim," and "Banks," glittering in green and gold ; his countless volumes upon topography, armour, and ancient pastimes ; and above all his German Wappenbuchs, and the illuminated genealogies named before. Yes, tears rose to the eyes of Ellinor, as she marked the delight with which her uncle displayed his treasures, for she felt that they were the only consolation to his mental suffering, and that in losing Ravenglass, he must lose his superb library, a loss to him above all else. The tear, however, was quickly dried, for despite the untoward visit of Mr. Benedict in the morning, Ellinor perceived that in the society of Lieutenant Conyers her uncle was enjoying a relaxation of mind such as he had not known for months ; and as Conyers addressed to her some trifling observation, the tone in which she answered him was perhaps made softer by the real gratitude which she felt towards him, for having, even for a brief space, relieved the oppressed mind of her beloved uncle.

Rose Arlington, meanwhile, had noticed both the tear which Ellinor had silently shed, and the smile with which she had answered Aubrey Conyers, and stealing towards her friend, while the curate and Francis were conversing together, and Aubrey and Mr. Musgrave fully occupied with their antiquarian volumes, she took the hand of Ellinor in hers, and whispered, " Was that tear dropt for the truant lover, Mr. Edmund, Ellinor ; and who was the smile meant for ? Ah,

Ellinor, Mr. Edmund Conyers is either very silly or very conceited ; why does he send this handsome young officer here, with this long story about a fall from his horse and a lonely inn? Ellinor, Ellinor, Mr. Edmund is very indiscreet !”

“And I foolishly susceptible : is that what you would imply, Rose ?” said Ellinor. “I will tell you, I could have wept to think of an annoyance which my uncle received this morning ; and I smiled because I perceived that in the agreeable society of Lieutenant Conyers he is enjoying what is to him the greatest of pleasures ; so you perceive, my dear wise Rose, that neither my tear nor my smile had anything at all to do with my fealty to Mr. Edmund. Oh, dear Rose, only be as circumspect for yourself as you are for me, and you will be as good and wise as the woman without a head, and she was the best woman in the world, you know.”


As Ellinor spoke, she glanced mischievously from Rose to Mr. Francis Conyers, who was still looking over the portfolio of prints which had made the excuse for the *tête-à-tête* in which they had indulged for the last hour, a *tête-à-tête* which none of the company, save Ellinor, had found leisure to remark, absorbed as they had been in the conversation of Aubrey. As for Rose, she blushed and looked confused under this retort of her friend ; but such reply as she might have made, was prevented by the entrance of Mr. Benedict, who had returned to sup and sleep at Ravenglas. The trays with the light repast that followed a late dinner had already been brought in by the servants, for when there was a mere domestic party like the present, Mr. Musgrave did not infringe his usual rule of supping in the library ; but at the present moment he was too enthusiastic upon his favourite subject of genealogies to notice either the appear-

ance of the supper or of Mr. Benedict, for he was occupied with his one foible, his pride of ancestry ; and could the spirit of the sapient king, James the First, have been evoked, he might have altered the remark which he addressed to the heir of the Lumleys, and exclaimed, after hearing the owner of Ravensglas expatiate upon the antiquity of his race, "Surely, then, we did not know till now that Adam's surname was Musgrave!"

However harmless a hobby may be, it nevertheless seldom happens but that the person who mounts it occasionally creates some annoyance to others, be it ever so unintentionally ; and such was the case even with Richard Musgrave, who, the kindest hearted of human beings, had certainly no intention to wound the feelings of Aubrey, when, as the party were seated at supper, he somewhat abruptly asked him to what branch of the Conyers family he belonged. This simple question seemed to confuse Aubrey, for he coloured and hesitated for a moment, ere he replied, that he knew but little of the origin of his own family, his father having died when he was a mere child ; but he believed the family had been some time settled in France, at any rate his grandfather was born there.

Perceiving at once from the manner of Aubrey that the subject was unpleasant, Ellinor Musgrave interposed with some remark that turned the conversation, though she was as much surprised at the embarrassment exhibited by Aubrey as she was displeased by the sneer which played upon the lips of Francis, as, leaning back in his chair, when Mr. Musgrave put the question regarding his family to Aubrey, he fixed his eyes upon the countenance of the latter, with a look more penetrating than polite. Ellinor observed, too, that Aubrey likewise noticed what she could not but think the imper-

tinent demeanour of the young scion of nobility ; for his eyes happening to meet those of Francis, as he ceased speaking, they seemed, though but for a moment, absolutely to sparkle with anger, and the colour flushed crimson on his brow. However strong the emotion of Aubrey, he nevertheless immediately mastered it, and answered in a tone of badinage the question which Ellinor addressed to him. Ellinor on her part, if she was indifferent to Edmund Conyers, absolutely disliked his brother ; there was something too supple and soft in his manners to please a person of so frank a disposition as hers ; with her acute judgment and powers of reflection, she very rightly estimated this young man's character : she admitted, indeed, that he was admirably calculated for the political life for which his father designed him ; but when, on the evening of Aubrey's visit to Ravenglas, she retired with Rose to the chamber which they were to share, she deeply offended the latter by the severity with which she spoke of the manner of Francis towards Aubrey, which had certainly, throughout the evening, been anything but cordial. Indeed, upon this unfortunate topic the young maidens, for the first time in their lives, and they had been companions from childhood, approached the very verge of a quarrel, when Ellinor, after a discussion of some duration, observed sharply that the amiable manners of Francis Conyers invariably put her in mind of the cat's velvet paw, from which at any time, or upon any caprice, the claws would protrude to the danger of the hand that caressed her. "Beware then, Rose !" she said, "of the extreme kindness which Mr. Francis exhibits towards your good father and yourself, and remember that, with all his affected kindness of heart, you cannot name the instance in which he has been of real service to any body. When the house of the widow



Martin was swept away by the floods last winter, and the lives of the woman and her child saved with so much difficulty, Mr. Francis gave the poor creature nothing but fair sympathising words, while even his careless, selfish brother, sent her five pounds."

"You should remember, Ellinor, that Mr. Francis is but a younger son," answered Rose; "he has scarcely the means of supporting his rank."

"There is some truth in your last observation, I admit," replied Ellinor; "but it seems to me a shocking system, by which one man, from the mere chance of being born the elder of another, is to inherit the whole of a large property, while his brothers, the children of the same parents, are born paupers by the law. I am no politician, but I really do presume to think, that a law so very unnatural must be very wrong. However, if Mr. Francis feels, as he no doubt does, the painful nature of his own position, he should show all the more gentlemanly forbearance towards the feelings of others; this Lieutenant Conyers is as much of a gentleman as himself, yet how rude, almost insulting, was his demeanour."

"I perceived nothing of the rudeness you talk about," answered Rose, pettishly. "I suppose only that Mr. Francis is not bewitched by this lieutenant, as you appear to be."

A somewhat tart reply to this speech rose to Ellinor's lips, but she recollected herself in a moment, and forbore to imitate the conduct she condemned in Francis Conyers, by affronting poor Rose, whose determined advocacy of Francis, however, seriously troubled her friend.

CHAPTER VII.

"'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to the world."

HAMLET.

ON being shown to his chamber, for Mr. Musgrave had insisted upon Aubrey passing the night at Ravenglas, he felt but ill inclined to sleep; and though he immediately sought his bed, the extreme weariness consequent on his adventures of the preceding night produced the not uncommon result of depriving him of the very repose which he needed. The chamber to which Conyers had been shown was situate in a long gallery, the apartments of which were generally devoted to visitors, and this gallery was contiguous to the "Agnes Tower;" the room indeed which Aubrey occupied overlooked the dilapidated garden of that tower, which had not been attended to since Lady Geraldine's death. A large fire had been kindled in Aubrey's apartment, and he lay for some time listlessly watching the flames as they leaped up and showed the quaint, antique furniture of the chamber, the oaken cabinets, and wardrobes grotesquely but richly carved, and the walls hung in a fashion of the reigns of the first Georges, with green leather, on which was depicted in gold strange outré figures of men and animals, castles and cottages, which in their sublime disregard of perspective were almost worthy the talents even of a Chinese artist. It would be hard to name the thousand thoughts that flitted with lightning rapidity through the brain of Aubrey, as he lay,

unable to sleep from the mere effect of intense excitement both of mind and body. Certainly, in those midnight reveries, Aubrey remembered his sick mother, and fair young sister, and turned a momentary eye of regret on the happy years they had passed under the patronage of General St. Leger: and some bitterness too tinged the thoughts of Aubrey, as he remembered how very kind and friendly the world had been while he was reputed the heir of his mother's irascible cousin. With a feeling of indignant scorn, too, did he recal how, little by little, the aspect of his summer weather friends had changed, so soon as the quarrel with General St. Leger had been known amongst them. There had, indeed, ere he was twenty-two years of age, been the promise of a company held out to Aubrey, but then he was the heir of General St. Leger; and now he had numbered three years more, but was still a lieutenant, with no chance of promotion but through his abilities and standing in the service, which he had latterly understood to be a very poor chance indeed. How high swelled the anger of Aubrey against General St. Leger as these thoughts passed through his mind! His sister, the sweet and lovely Adela, upon whose brow he would willingly have placed the coronet of a duchess, ay, the crown of a queen, what had been the alternative upon which the unjust old soldier had offered the continuance of his favour? That she—that being so young and charming—should sacrifice herself, in the bloom of her beauty and her youth, to a man more than double her age, a wretch who thought his gold, his vile pelf, was a fitting barter for the priceless beauty and purity of Adela Conyers, a creature beautiful and pure as the new-born snow-drop, unblighted by the lingering blasts, untarnished by a speck of earth's gross dust. With the thought of Adela, too, his dear and

charming Adela, stole before the mental eye of Conyers another form no less fair than that of his beloved sister. But the vain dreams of imagination, the subtle whisperings of the deceitful heart, had not yet so far deluded the reason of Aubrey Conyers but that he sought to banish those fancies as quickly as they rose. But reason for once was in the cause of fancy and the heart, and he sighed involuntarily when he thought of the pure, the intellectual Ellinor, whose chastity and nobility of soul might be read in the lovely mirror of her face; of the beautiful and as he feared deluded Magdalen, and of the vain, frothy, and frivolous Edmund Conyers. Then he found himself discussing the chances as to whether a woman of so superior a mind as that which even the intercourse of a single day had discovered in Ellinor could possibly have fixed her heart's affections on, or could be happy with a creature so poor and trifling as the man who had announced himself as her future husband. But then Aubrey remembered all that he had read of the perversity of female affections, and upon that ground thought it possible that Ellinor Musgrave might even love Edmund Conyers. And if she did love him, then how still more dreary were her prospects; for not all the asseverations of Edmund had removed from the mind of Aubrey his suspicion, that it was as a lover of the young woman Magdalen that the heir of Lord Allerdale had come into collision with the people of the lone house upon the heath. Aubrey involuntarily sighed as these thoughts passed through his mind, and the sigh was succeeded by a smile, at the absurdity of the fancy that had crossed his mind, for surely he admitted that nothing could be more absurd than for a poor lieutenant in the army, with no support beyond his pay, to be building castles in the air, as to what he would do if he were very rich, and decide that

the heiress of Ravensglas was the lady above all whom he had seen that he would have selected for his ladye love. Wearied at length with thought, and unable to sleep, Aubrey remembered that he had noticed a few books on a shelf, and rose with the intention of kindling his night lamp, from a phosphorus box which he always kept about him. The apartment which he occupied being so remote from those tenanted by the family, the most profound silence had hitherto reigned around, and it was the very solemnity of the preceding silence that made him start, when the sound of a heavy door closing apparently in the apartment below his own met his ears. There certainly was nothing extraordinary in this circumstance, as Aubrey knew not for what purpose some member of the household might have visited that quarter of the building, nor would he have given the subject a second thought, but that from the nature of the sound he judged it was an outer door which he had heard closed, and when he entered the chamber he had observed that the windows overlooked only the garden of the "Agnes Tower," which he knew was not used, as having, in the course of the evening, spoken to Mr. Arlington of the picturesque appearance of the tower, that gentleman had given him its history, and also stated why it had been of late years shut up. An impulse of curiosity, therefore, induced Aubrey to step towards the window. The night, a very reverse of the preceding one, was clear, bright moonlight, and the huge buttresses and narrow casements of the "Agnes Tower," with the tangled thickets, and neglected walks of the garden below, were as fully discoverable as by the light of day. A small lawn with a fountain in the centre, the former with the grass a foot long, and the latter silent and overgrown with moss, lay immediately beneath the apartment occupied by Aubrey. The form of

the garden was quadrangular; on two sides it was bounded by the more modern portions of the manor-house; on the third it was overlooked by the "Agnes Tower;" while on the fourth was a stately terrace which was reached by a flight of steps from the extensive gardens that lay beyond it, and was not at all accessible from the garden of the "Agnes Tower."

As Aubrey still gazed from the window, he beheld a stream of ruddier light mingle with the pale ray of the moonbeams that rested on the lawn; and a tall figure of a man, wrapped in a mantle, and bearing a lantern in his hand, crossed the dilapidated garden, and entered the "Agnes Tower" by a postern door. Marvelling much that any person should leave their own chamber at such a lone hour of the night, and fearing that possibly it was some dishonest servant who thus visited the tower, Aubrey forgot his intention of seeking for a book, and returning to his bed, lay for some time anxiously listening for a renewal of the sounds he had heard in the apartment below. Slumber thus overtook him, but from that slumber he was roused by a shriek so full of mortal agony, so long, so wild and piercing, that he sprung from his couch in horror such as he had never before experienced. The first thought of Aubrey was that the house was beset with murderers and thieves; and hastily slipping on a portion of his clothes, he snatched up the lamp which he had left burning, and his pistols, and rushed out into the gallery. Another long painful cry met his ears as he sallied from his room, but it was neither so thrilling nor so violent as the first—a mournful, piteous wail, that seemed to announce how nearly the strength of the sufferer was subdued. It seemed to proceed, too, from the remote end of the gallery, which was closed by a pair of vast folding doors, that communicated, as Aubrey judged from their position, with

the principal apartments of the Agnes Tower. The gallery referred to, as its chambers were set apart for the accommodation of visitors, was one of the finest portions of the castellated manor-house of Ravenglas. It was of great length and width, with a corresponding height ; the ceiling was of carved oak, the richly traceried windows being for the most part filled with stained glass. On the panels between these windows, hung the portraits of various worthies of the race of Musgrave ; but the panel next to the last window, instead of a picture, was occupied by a door which, at the first glance, seemed in the outer wall. This door was now standing partly open, and admitted Conyers to a little recess, about six feet square, and made evidently only in the thickness of the wall, while to its left and within the recess appeared another door, lined with red baize. From behind this door the low wailing cry was again heard, and as Conyers hastily pushed it open, he found himself in an apartment of noble dimensions, superbly furnished, and hung with crimson satin. At one end of this chamber a pair of folding doors stood open, and opposite to those doors was an enormous pier glass. As Conyers momentarily turned his eyes towards this glass, he beheld the shadow of a tall figure wrapped in dark garments flit athwart it, apparently the reflection of some person passing through the inner apartment. To turn his own steps towards that inner apartment was the immediate impulse of Conyers, and he entered it just in time to perceive the dark drapery which he had noticed in the glass, disappear through a door at the opposite end of the room. Conyers rushed forwards, he called to the person to stop, but on passing through the door, he obtained only another glimpse of the dark drapery vanishing at the top of a narrow staircase. Satisfied from the obstinate silence of this person that it was no member of

the household of Mr. Musgrave whom he pursued, Aubrey now spoke of his pistols, and threatened to fire, the reply to which threat was a pistol bullet sent down the staircase with an accuracy of aim that had well-nigh proved fatal to Aubrey, as it passed within a hair's breadth of his temples, and fixed in the wall at the foot of the stairs. Indignant at this savage attempt upon his life, Aubrey fired his own weapon, and though without aim, with, as it appeared, a certain effect, as a hollow cry, a bitter execration, and a heavy sound of feet was heard, and then all was still.

Aubrey now hesitated how he should proceed; fool-hardiness is not courage, and he felt that any attempt on his part to ascend that narrow staircase, where he knew not what number of concealed foes might lurk, was madness; for it was now his impression that a party of burglars had made their way into Ravenglas, and that to pursue them alone was uselessly to expose his life. He therefore returned to the chambers through which he had lately passed, intending to summon assistance to explore these apartments. As he entered the large room in which was the mirror, a low groan met his ears, but no words can express his horror, when he perceived his amiable host, Richard Musgrave, extended on the ground, perfectly senseless, and with his features distorted as by a fit. To raise the old man in his arms, bear him to the bed in his own room, and summon assistance by loudly ringing his chamber bell, was, with Aubrey, the work of a few minutes.

The first person who appeared was old Thomson, the favourite attendant of Mr. Musgrave; he seemed, however, as Aubrey thought, more grieved than surprised at the condition in which he found his master, and while he pressed the cold hand of Richard to his lips, and bathed his temples with vinegar, he murmured, "Alas! alas! again to-night; well,

well, I feared it would be so, I feared it would, when that man came here to-day ; his visits kill him, they will kill him ; alas, alas, my poor dear master !”

To Aubrey’s assertion that he apprehended thieves were in the house, the old servant paid but little attention. The disturbance in the house presently roused up Ellinor herself, and a man on horseback was dispatched to fetch the nearest medical practitioner, while Mr. Musgrave was removed, still insensible, to his own chamber. It was then, when Ellinor and some of the servants had withdrawn, that Aubrey related to Mr. Arlington and Francis Conyers, who had also been roused up by the tumult, his adventures of the night, the visit of some person to the “Agnes Tower,” the mysterious figure he had seen in the apartments at the end of the gallery, and the shot which had been fired at him and which he had returned. The opinions of both those gentlemen coincided with that of Aubrey, that, as some desperate character was probably lurking about those rooms, they ought to be immediately and vigorously searched. To this proposition, however, the servants were not willing to accede, casting significant glances at each other, and mumbling something about those rooms not being often entered, and the likelihood that Lieutenant Conyers had made some mistake ; and when they were positively bidden by Mr. Arlington to bring lights, and assist the gentlemen in their search, they flatly refused upon the plea that those chambers were haunted. At any other time, Aubrey would have laughed at a superstition so gross, but at the present moment it was annoying, inasmuch as he was sure those rooms contained some substantial worker of mischief in flesh and blood, who, from the knowledge he possessed of the locality, it might be dangerous to approach, save in company with persons of the household, equally acquainted with

the intricacies of the building. Aubrey explained these circumstances to Mr. Arlington and Francis, and the latter was still arguing with the servants, when Mr. Benedict made his appearance. The naturally sallow face of the lawyer looked at that moment absolutely ghastly, and his eyes had a wild disordered expression. He trembled violently as if with the cold, and wore wrapped closely round him a large roquelaure. He did not take part with, or excuse the fears of the servants, but adopted a tone yet more unpleasing and offensive to Aubrey. For the story of the figure seen in the pier glass, and the pistol shot down the stairs, he expressed the most impertinent incredulity, till silenced by Aubrey's remark that the last point might be readily settled by a visit to the rooms, where the bullet which he had escaped would be found bedded in the wall, and would readily decide the question as to whether he had been the victim of so extraordinary a delusion as it pleased Mr. Benedict to suppose. Finally, as the servants one and all, with the exception of the old butler, expressed the greatest repugnance to venturing into the rooms at the end of the west gallery, Mr. Arlington, Francis Conyers, and Aubrey, declared their determination of proceeding thither alone. Mr. Benedict professed his desire of accompanying them, and the servants, finding their master's guests so resolved, then summoned up courage to creep after them, huddled close together, and leaving to Aubrey and his companions the honours and dangers of making the first attack on the fortress of the ghosts. It should be observed, that when Mr. Musgrave's attendant old Thomson was first summoned, he explained to Aubrey the nature of the fits from which his master suffered, and accounted for his having been found in those deserted rooms by the restlessness which he said was always the pre-

cursor of the attacks, and which on more than one occasion had led the unfortunate gentleman to wander about the park and grounds in the dead of the night. On the party proceeding towards the crimson drawing room, the butler produced a key to open the great folding doors at the end of the gallery ; but observing the small door in the thickness of the wall already open, he eagerly examined the bunch of keys which he carried, and to which he still found depending those which opened both the great folding doors, and the smaller one at the side of the gallery. A blank surprise appeared in the old man's countenance, and he inquired of Aubrey whether it was in the gallery or within the crimson drawing room that he had found Mr. Musgrave. On Aubrey's replying that it was within the room, the butler examined the lock to ascertain if the entrance to those rooms had been made by violence ; but it had been fairly opened by means of a key, which key however was now withdrawn from the lock ; and approaching Aubrey as they entered the rooms, the old servant said, in a low tone, " Really, sir, there is more in this matter than I can understand ; the devil himself must have been playing his cantrips here to-night, for the keys of these rooms are always in my keeping, and I know that Mr. Musgrave has not duplicates of any of them, since, when he visits these rooms, which it is sometimes his fancy to do, he always sends for me to bring the keys ; and I made up my mind, when I was called up and told that you had seen a thief in the chambers at the end of the west gallery, I made up my mind that the doors had been forced !"

Aubrey of course could afford no clue to this mystery ; and the party pursued their investigation of the rooms. No trace, however, of any person was discovered there, and various




THE SEARCH THROUGH THE OLD HALL.

articles of value which they contained remained untouched. On reaching the foot of the staircase, where Aubrey had lost sight of the person whom he had tracked through the rooms, the oaken wainscot was found splintered by the bullet which had been fired at him. At the foot of this staircase, however, the servants, with the exception of old Thomson, the butler, stopped, and refused to go a step further. This very staircase, and the apartments above, Aubrey thought it most necessary to explore, and he would have been the first person to ascend it, but that Mr. Benedict, with another display of that rudeness of manner which he had exhibited on first hearing Aubrey's account of his adventure in the deserted rooms, pushed almost roughly past him, crying in a jibing tone, "I really cannot suffer the sword to take entire precedence of the long robe in this important investigation, wherein it appears to me a lawyer's sharp apprehension may be of as much avail as a soldier's courage ; and see, the fox has left his trail ; it appears, Mr. Conyers, that you fired with military accuracy !" As he spoke, Mr. Benedict lowered the taper which he carried, and pointed out to the company some large spots of blood that were still fresh and wet upon the oaken stairs. There was, however, something almost ghastly in the smile with which he accompanied his sneering words, and as the light of the taper flashed full upon his features as he stooped, Aubrey noticed that they were ashy pale, and that large drops of perspiration stood upon his brow.

These blood marks which Mr. Benedict pointed out increased the terror of the servants, and as they still marked every stair on the ascent, even Aubrey spoke of the necessity of caution in mounting them, as it was probable the burglar or his companions, if he had any, might still be lurking in

some dark corner, or on the landing-place above. Mr. Benedict, however, still persisted in leading the party, and, with an air of reckless indifference, mounted the stairs so quickly, that he was the first to enter the small room at the top. This was a kind of turret chamber, of octagonal form, and having windows which on all sides commanded a charming view of the surrounding country. For this reason it had been elegantly fitted up by Richard Musgrave, and used as a kind of boudoir or work-room by Lady Geraldine. It would have made Ellinor sad to enter that room, so many mute remembrances of her mother were scattered around. On a beautiful table of ebony inlaid with mother of pearl, lay an unfinished drawing, and an ivory box containing pencils and water colours. In one corner stood a harp, mute, like the voice whose tones had once been full and sweet as those of the sounding strings it had accompanied—those strings which now trailed in mournful broken fragments on the ground. The hangings of this room were of Chinese silk, of a delicate straw colour, with figures of birds and flowers printed on it in hues the lustre of which time itself had not faded. The carpet, which was thick and soft, had been chosen as far as possible to correspond with the hangings, and upon its pale groundwork there were stains of fresh blood larger than those upon the stairs.. Aubrey and his companions gazed anxiously round for the outlet by which the wounded person had escaped, for this chamber was at the top of the little turret, and had no story above it, as indeed, before ascending the stairs, they had been informed by old Thomson. The track of blood swept across the turret chamber, and was sprinkled even to the verge of the hangings opposite the door, but certainly there was no mode of egress from that point. Aubrey, however, was about to sound the wall, when Mr.



Benedict called the attention of the party to an open window at the upper end of the room, and towards which the blood was transversely visible from the point where it stopped beneath the hanging. Below this open window was a large stone balcony, into which it would have been easy to leap, but the descent from thence was so palpably dangerous, that it was the opinion of Aubrey and that of every other person present, that such a leap could scarce have been accomplished without injury either to life or limb.

Nevertheless it appeared evident, as Mr. Benedict observed, that in no other way could the intruder have escaped, and with this conclusion, after examining every corner of the apartments contiguous to the west gallery, Aubrey and his companions were compelled to retire. The night was now "almost at odds with morning, which was which," and, worn out with the excitement of the last forty-eight hours, Aubrey was glad to retire to his chamber, after an inquiry as to the condition of Mr. Musgrave, who, he was informed, had recovered from the fit in which he had found him, but was ordered by the medical attendant to keep perfectly quiet. When Aubrey Conyers again threw himself on his bed, he sunk almost immediately into a profound sleep, in which, however, all the persons to whom he had been so lately introduced were incoherently mixed with the characters and events of his early life.

Mr. Benedict followed the example of Aubrey, and pleading indisposition and fatigue, withdrew to his chamber; but Mr. Arlington and Francis Conyers, refreshed by the sleep they had enjoyed before the late disturbance, sat discussing the strange disappearance of the person whom Aubrey had doubtless seen, and various other topics connected with the fortunes of the owners of Ravenglas, till the grey

autumnal dawn peeped into the apartment, and the air grew so cold, and they so wearied, that the luxurious breakfast with its hot coffee and chocolate, with which they were presently served by the care of old Thomson, was about the most comfortable thing that could be offered to them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"There's not a wretch that lives on common charity
But's happier than me ; for I have known
The luscious sweets of plenty : every night
Have slept with soft content about my head,
And never waked but to a joyful morning."

VENICE PRESERVED.

WHILE Aubrey Conyers was in the wilds of Cumberland being introduced to new characters, and events the most romantic and startling, his sick mother and his fair sister Adela were suffering in London under an accumulation of those petty common-place miseries which are the most galling to a noble spirit.

Since the time when General St. Leger had so unjustly withdrawn his countenance from the family which he had led to expect from him the indulgence of a father, the poor Adela and her mother had sipped a drop at a time the bitter cup of poverty.

In the sweet story of Claudine in the charming "Canterbury Tales" of the Misses Lee, the hero is made to call "poverty, real relentless poverty, the greatest of human ills, guilt alone excepted." Few of their sex have shown a more fearful knowledge of the dark recesses of the human heart than those gifted sisters, the authoresses of the "Two Emilys," and "Kruitzner."

And that awful knowledge, for awful is the knowledge of the human heart, failed them not in the above sentence. Yes, poverty is the worst of human ills, guilt alone, sickness *not* excepted ; for, oh, how much can wealth do to ease the

pangs of the sufferer; and how often does the scanty meal, the harassed mind, produce the raging fever or the slow decline; or, worse than either, some baleful organic disease, an affection of the heart or brain, induced by the strain upon the nerves, and causing the intense anguish which medical men understand and nervous patients alone feel.

This horror of poverty is chiefly endured by the highly educated and gently born. The lower classes are less unfortunate; among them, though it is a sad fate, yet the little girl at twelve years of age will earn her shilling a week and her meals, by nursing a baby,—a weary task indeed, very melancholy to the poor child, who, instead of bounding along the green fields to gather health and beauty, must pine in the dull streets, with her little arms aching under the weight of a possibly peevish infant, and her spine becoming distorted by the unnatural burthen; while her poor brother toils no less under the hot sun, with a basket far too heavy for his strength, containing grocery, or butter and cheese, or the miscellaneous articles sold by the Italian warehousemen. Still these poor children obtain food, and are rejoiced by the receipt of their little pittance at the end of the week; and the family meet to their dinner on the Sunday with something like comfort, for the hard earnings even of the poor children contribute to the purchase of that good meal. But not even this amelioration attends the poverty of the wretched, most superlatively wretched middle classes: their boys cannot carry out parcels for the grocer or cheesemonger, or their girls nurse babies for a shilling per week. Worse, far worse than the poverty of the mechanic and his wife is that of the educated middle classes,—of those who shrink from the menial employment, and who, at the price of essential comfort, must *keep up appearances*. And in “the deepest

depth, a deeper still," yet worse than all the rest, is such poverty as that which was endured by Adela Conyers and her mother, who, after having for years enjoyed, under the protection of the capricious General St. Leger, absolute luxury for the present, and the brightest hopes for the future, were, at a moment's warning, plunged into the dull wearing miseries of genteel poverty. It was not for some time after they had been so cruelly banished by the unjust and irascible old man, that the Conyers family, and more especially Adela and her mother, felt the full bitterness of the change. About a hundred pounds in money, and a handsome stock of trinkets was theirs when they quitted the Elms, General St. Leger's seat; but poor Mrs. Conyers had never been the best of economists, and the profusion which the General had absolutely encouraged, had by no means amended the carelessness of her early habits. Beside this, though most devotedly attached to her children, her long sufferings had made her, as is not unfrequently the case, somewhat peevish and self-indulgent; and she fretted as much at seeing them sacrifice their ordinary enjoyments, as for any deprivation of her own. The effect of this inconsiderate temper was, in the first instance, that instead of taking either lodgings or a small house in some cheap suburb of London, Mrs. Conyers and her daughter rented apartments in Clarges-street; the house was that of a veritable London lodging-house keeper, by which all those who are acquainted with the keepers of London lodging-houses will of course understand, that not only did Mrs. Conyers and her daughter pay for the three rooms the rent of the whole house, but that according to the understood regulations of such houses, their table, in common with those of the other lodgers, was laid under contribution to save the landlady from any necessity

of purchasing provision for hers. For a few months, while the ready cash lasted, neither Adela nor her mother took much notice of these proceedings; besides, they had still a hope that the General would relent; but when that time had elapsed, and the old man still remained inflexible, and Aubrey, on coming to town, was obliged to assist them with money from his pay, the first gripe of that money-difficulty showed Adela that she and her mother could not afford to live at the rate of eight or nine pounds per week out of an income of nothing, for the sake of charitably supporting the family of their landlady.

The most valuable of Adela's ornaments was a set of pearls, given to her by the General on her sixteenth birthday. Unjust as had been the conduct of the old man, she still really valued these ornaments for his sake, and after the departure of her brother, from whom she had concealed the extent of the embarrassments in which she and her mother were involved, she could not refrain from tears as she looked for the last time at her pearls, and resolved to part with them. Ignorant, however, as she was of the Babylon of London, poor Adela knew not where to apply in order to dispose of her gems, and a certain false pride induced her rather to address even her rapacious landlady upon the subject, than enter the shop of a respectable jeweller and ask what he would give for the pearls. Mrs. Jackson, the landlady, was not only a very dishonest, but a very cunning woman; she was well content, indeed, when she found that Adela was under the necessity of parting with her trinkets, that she and Mrs. Conyers should leave her house and obtain cheaper lodgings, but she resolved not only to have a commission on the sale of the pearls, but also to keep her eye upon the movements of Mrs. Conyers and her daughter, as persons who might yet,

in some way that she knew not of, prove profitable to herself. She thereupon affected a world of sympathy with the young lady's misfortunes, and finally introduced her to a Jew money-lender and horse-jockey, who also traded in jewels, that is to say, if a young spendthrift heir would give him a bond for a thousand pounds at an enormous interest, Mr. Silvertree would advance two or three hundred in the shape of cash, and insist that the remainder should be taken in jewellery, which was worth about a fifth of the sum charged for it. To this person, who was in the habit of rendering yet viler, and more dishonourable services to the men of fashion who could pay for them, was the innocent Adela Conyers introduced by Mrs. Jackson, and he, calculating, like the landlady, that the inexperienced girl might yet prove a source of profit, generously presented her with fifty pounds for a set of pearls worth above two hundred, and for which a respectable jeweller would certainly have allowed her one hundred. It is true that Mr. Silvertree also presented the landlady with ten pounds for having thrown so excellent a bargain in his way, a small gain for her in comparison with Adela's loss; but there is nothing like setting your neighbour's house on fire for the chance of roasting an egg by the flames. More than one or two eggs did Mrs. Jackson roast in this fashion out of the distresses of poor Adela, making friendly visits after she and her mother had left her house, and rendering herself still the channel through which everything in the shape of a trinket, even to their watches and rings, passed into the hands of Mr. Silvertree. And even after all was gone, and Adela and her mother were reduced to live on the scanty earnings of the former as a governess, together with what trifle Aubrey could spare, Mrs. Jackson still continued her visits, partly incited by an impertinent curiosity, not

unmixed with that satisfaction which people of her class feel in contemplating the distress of their superiors. The fact was that the valuables with which Mrs. Conyers and Adela parted in less than a twelvemonth through the means of this woman, would, had they received anything like the real worth, have supported them for a considerable time, and had Aubrey been with them they would not have been so grossly imposed upon; but during the whole of the year ensuing to the rupture with General St. Leger, Aubrey's regiment was stationed in Ireland, and though he could more than once have obtained leave of absence, he felt it to be the most prudent course to deprive himself of the pleasure of seeing his mother and sister, and transmit to them the money which his journey would have cost, while they, on their parts, for a long while concealed from him that they had disposed of their trinkets. When, indeed, on his visit to London, ere he joined his regiment in Cumberland, Aubrey learned upon what terms they had really parted with every article they possessed of worth, his indignation at the audacious dishonesty of Mr. Silvertree would have led him to seek redress at law, but that such a measure would have exposed the distress to which his mother and sister had been reduced,—a consideration which very often compels the poor sufferers from poverty to bear in silence the wrongs which the law, imperfect even as it is, would redress.

Adela and Mrs. Conyers were of opinion that Mrs. Jackson had herself been imposed upon by the Jew, but Aubrey did not give her credit for so much simplicity, remembering her own speculations while his mother and sister lodged in her house; and almost his last words ere he set out on his journey were, an entreaty that they would drop the acquaintance of that woman. With this injunc-

tion, however, it really was not easy to comply; Mrs. Jackson was not readily got rid of, and her acts of simulated kindness were so many, and apparently so sincere, that she might have imposed upon persons who had more knowledge of the world, and sterner hearts, than either Mrs. Conyers or her daughter.

The continual ill health of Mrs. Conyers was a great drain upon the purses of her children, and when Aubrey was last in town he had represented to his sister that she might as well spare herself the fatigue of toiling for the paltry stipend of fifteen shillings per week, which she had latterly been earning as a daily governess, since the constant attendance of a nurse upon her mother cost nearly the same sum. But Adela could not endure the thought of relying entirely on the poor income of her brother; besides, she told him that in the house in which she and her mother now lodged, she was saved the expense of a regular nurse, as the landlady and her daughter were very kind, and suffered Mrs. Conyers to want for nothing during her absence. The inexperience of Adela did not exaggerate the kindness of these people, a widow and her daughter, who had known better days, and who felt for the poor because they were very poor themselves. The philosophers and theologians are right, riches *do* harden the heart; the poor alone feel for the poor. Therefore perhaps it was that Mrs. Windsor and her daughter Charlotte, remembering the comfort they had known in the lifetime of the father and husband, the captain of a small trading vessel, and contrasting that comfort with their present precarious means of livelihood, chiefly through Charlotte's employment as a milliner and dress-maker—therefore it was that poor girl and her mother felt deeply for the lady and her daughter whose reverse of fortune had

been even greater than their own. Yet the case of Mrs. Windsor was pitiable enough ; besides her daughter she had two sons, the elder of whom, seven years older than Charlotte, was now second mate on board a China ship, and might have been a great aid to his mother and sister, which to his shame he was not. William Windsor was a specimen of the worst class of young men of the present day, we fear the majority, who seem to expect everything from their relations, and to give nothing in return ; and who, monsters of selfishness themselves, demand from others a self-abnegation on their behalf which would amount to absolute fatuity. Before William Windsor obtained his post on board the China ship, he made it a continual practice to quarter himself in his mother's house, and subsist on the scanty earnings of his sister whenever he was out of a ship ; and many a time had poor Charlotte spent the money which she had, by dint of hard labour, saved for a new gown or bonnet, upon the support of the worthless selfish brother, who, now that he was in good employment, never sent home to her or her mother a single pound.

A disposition less amiable than that of Charlotte Windsor would have been quite embittered by this ungrateful conduct ; but that poor girl, though a settled hatred began gradually to replace her former love for William, seemed to draw from that hatred yet a deeper affection for her mother and the little Henry, who it seemed were to look to her only for their bread. And if any presage of the man is to be drawn from the demeanour of the child, poor Charlotte had better things to expect of her younger brother, who, when they had a scanty meal, would want to give up his own share, or when he found that his mother and sister were harassed for taxes, or for rent—children soon learn to know

the meaning of those ominous words—would look up with tearful eyes at Charlotte and his mother, and exclaim:—“Oh, mother, what a wicked boy William is, that he does not send you any money. How I wish I was a man! I would pay all these nasty people, and we would have nice dinners and breakfasts every day.”

The child is father to the man; William Windsor had been a greedy selfish child. It would have been a happy event for Mrs. Conyers and Adela that they had been thrown in contact with this gentle girl and her mother, but that the very tenderness of heart which was the characteristic of both families, perhaps increased their sufferings as each witnessed that of the other. Nevertheless, the little household had become most closely united, sharing alike all each other's troubles, and their very scanty joys; and if Charlotte snatched the time amid her work to attend upon the sick Mrs. Conyers, Adela, though worn out with the toil of teaching, would sit up half the night to help Charlotte complete some order unexpectedly received, the payment for which might secure a cheerful and sufficient meal on the Sunday. We soon come to love those who sympathize with and share our sufferings, and Mrs. Conyers and her daughter were incapable of that base pride which can repulse an honest and affectionate heart, because its owner may have been born in a sphere more humble than our own.

These were the people then in whose house Adela and her mother now lived, and if some extra suffering were occasioned by the mutual distress, yet the sympathy brought its comfort too.

The second day after that on which Aubrey first met the heir of Allerdale, the weather in London was wet and gloomy, and the fog and rain were accompanied by a clammy

heat, both unseasonable and unwholesome. About three o'clock in the afternoon Adela Conyers was wearily picking her way through the dense rain to her home in the narrow street at Walworth, which appeared yet closer and narrower, after the free fresh air which seemed to fill the grounds about the house inhabited by her pupils on Clapham Common ; for Clapham is really a cheerful healthy place, despite its having been chosen as their most favourite resort, by flashy stock-brokers, and retired sanctified cheesemongers and grocers.

The pupils of Miss Conyers were not the daughters either of a cheesemonger or a grocer ; their father had married their mother for the sake of entering into the proprietorship of a West-end of the town hotel, which her father had originally established ; and both the father and husband dying a few years after her marriage, Mrs. Hitchins had retired from the business, with a very competent fortune, to ruralize at Clapham.

Of this woman, a tall lean person, with a sallow sour face, it is enough to say, that she was as insolent, illiterate, ill-natured, and purse-proud, as a low woman possibly could be. Her daughters were three coarse, vulgar, spiteful girls, whose ages varied from thirteen to sixteen, not deficient in a certain quickness of apprehension, but thoroughly idle, and without even the charm of beautiful features or graceful manners. Previous to the engagement of Adela, they had been denizens of that very admirable home of all the virtues, a large English boarding-school, and the lessons of morality which they had imbibed there had so frightened even the stupidity of their mother, that she had forthwith removed them, forbade their perusal of a cheap edition of Scott's novels which their father had purchased, and stipulated that every morning they should read a chapter in the Old Testa-

ment, which reading was followed by another chapter of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,"—an odd association of studies as it appeared to Adela, whose Biblical reading had been, while at school, confined almost entirely to the pure lessons of the Gospel, and who had been cautioned by her brother as to the reserve with which she must read the pages of the brilliant, but infidel Gibbon. It was in vain, however, that, soon penetrating as she did the coarse characters of her pupils, Adela endeavoured to make their mother understand that the sublimity and awful lessons of the Scripture affected them not, that even in those sacred pages they found food for their corrupt fancies, and that while their minds were by no means sufficiently enlarged to enable them to value the excellence of Gibbon as an historian, they very well, so far as their knowledge of language would permit them, comprehended all that was pernicious in his great work. In her simplicity of soul, and honesty of purpose, poor Adela even ventured so far as to say, with reference to the "Decline and Fall," that she thought her pupils would derive more advantage from reading "Ivanhoe," or "Waverley," an assertion which roused to perfect indignation the piety of the poor mother, who told Miss Conyers flatly, that she knew her duty as a mother far better than to allow her daughters to read novels, and more than hinted that her acquaintance with the writings of Sir Walter did not recommend Adela as the preceptress of the young ladies; and there Mrs. Hitchins was correct, for not from the stainless pages of the greatest of modern writers had Adela imbibed sentiments agreeable to the characters of her pupils. The severity with which Adela forbade the detail of their boarding-school reminiscences soon made her an object of dislike to the Misses Hitchins, and as they

could not prevail upon their mother to dismiss the young governess and send them back to school, they amiably established for her a system of annoyance, the effect of which upon the somewhat excitable nerves of Adela was so strong, that she literally trembled and grew sick at heart as she rung at the bell of the house in which her turbulent pupils resided.

On the day following that of Aubrey's introduction to Ravenglas, poor Adela took her homeward way with a heart even heavier than usual, for she had that morning encountered something more than the usual amount of insolence from her pupils and their mother. In the first place, not one of the lessons which she had marked on the preceding day had been studied, and after jesting and idling away their time with their books in their hands, at which no entreaties or commands of Adela could prevail upon them to look, when the hour for the music lessons arrived the three charming young ladies, by way of perfecting the entertainments of the morning, thumped their unfortunate piano out of all tune, and purposely racked the ears of Adela with wrong notes and false chords. How thankful she was when the clock, striking two, announced her emancipation for that morning, none but a governess or teacher can fully understand. Besides, she had left her mother at home more than commonly indisposed, and what was yet worse, they had changed their last shilling on the preceding night, and the Saturday on which she would receive her usual splendid weekly stipend was still three days off; nor did she expect that any money would arrive from Aubrey till the ensuing week, his letter not having yet come to hand, through the carelessness of the post. These thoughts of home had, it may well be imagined, aggravated for Adela all the annoy-

ance occasioned by her perverse pupils, and she was tripping lightly down the stairs, rejoicing that her torment was over for the day, when the wiry but loud voice of Mrs. Hitchins was heard from the dining-room, exclaiming, "You are going before your time, Miss Conyers—you are going before your time."

The insolent tone of the woman roused the proud spirit of Adela, and, pausing at the door of the room, she answered indignantly, "I am not going before my time, madam; the clock has struck two!"

"Yes, yes, Miss, I know it has!" reiterated Mrs. Hitchins, as she darted out of the parlour, rather with the air and aspect of an enraged fish-wife than of a lady, "and it was a quarter past ten, Miss, when you came, and if you please to look at the clock, you will see that it is not much above five minutes past two; and as you have had time to put on your things, you must have finished the young ladies' studies the moment it struck. I cannot allow this kind of behaviour, Miss Conyers; you must give the whole four hours that you agreed for."

"Madam," answered Adela, with a disgust she was unable to control, "I certainly should not have supposed that you would have calculated for a few minutes, especially on a wet day such as this, which possibly occasioned my being a little later than usual, for I left home at the customary time, and I really did not look at the clock when I came in. But since you are so very particular, I must be particular also, and beg to remind you, that I have repeatedly remained with your daughters till half past two."

"I did not ask you to do so," answered Mrs. Hitchins, "and I request you will not do it again, to make your staying late at one time an excuse for going home early at

another ; there is no method in such proceedings ; we do not know what we are about. Be so good, too, as to come into the dining-room ; there is another matter I want to speak to you about."

Poor Adela submitted with a sigh. Mrs. Hitchins was determined on that day to have the worth of the money she paid to Miss Conyers, either in meal or in malt.

"I find, Miss Conyers," said Mrs. Hitchins, after seating herself in state, "that the young ladies never have any lessons ready against you come. Pray don't you mark lessons for them!—you ought."

"And I do, madam," answered Adela, "but I am sorry to say that those lessons are never looked at till I come the next day."

"So, then," cried Mrs. Hitchins, sharply, "the whole morning is consumed in learning lessons which ought to be prepared on the overnight ; you know, Miss Conyers, your pupils ought to have their lessons ready against you come."

"Indeed they ought, madam," replied Adela.

"Then, pray, Miss Conyers," returned the lady, with the air of one who had detected a terrible delinquency in Adela, "what is the reason that you do not assume a proper control over your pupils, and insist that they learn their lessons of an evening?"

"Dear madam," answered Adela, "how is it possible for me to control Miss Hitchins and her sisters, when I am not in the house ? They are always with you in the evening ; if you would exert your authority when I am absent, and represent to them the necessity of studying their lessons —"

"My authority!—me represent!" exclaimed Mrs. Hitchins, throwing herself back in her chair, with a kind of hysterical cry—"Oh, indeed, Miss Conyers, my nerves wont stand it;

those girls don't care for me—they won't do anything I tell them; they'll kill me, I know they will. You must speak to them; they do not care for me."

"But if they do not respect your commands, madam, as their mother," said Adela, "it can hardly be supposed they will care for mine."

"Oh, I don't know about that," cried Mrs. Hitchins; "I suppose I must let them go to 'boarding-school,' that is what they want; but before you leave to-day, Miss Conyers, you must go up stairs again, and tell them that I am very angry with them, and that they shall stay at home this evening, and I will go to the party at their aunt Tomkins' by myself."


If Mrs. Hitchins had not been so very tyrannical and insolent towards herself, Adela would really have pitied her for the weakness of mind which prevented her exerting a proper authority over her own children. The young ladies, on their part, received the announcement that they were to stay at home, while their mother went to Mrs. Tomkins' party, with great satisfaction, telling Adela, that "their aunt Tomkins was a regular marm, a miserly old hag, who never gave good suppers; and since mamma was going out by herself, they would wheedle some nice things out of cook, and have jolly fun with John the gardener."

CHAPTER IX.

"I passed this very moment by thy doors,
And found them guarded by a troop of villains."

VENICE PRESERVED.

THE conversation with Mrs. Hitchins, and the going up stairs again to speak with the girls, so trenched upon poor Adela's time, that after all it was nearly three o'clock before she left the house; and the drizzling rain which had been falling through the morning, now came down in a heavy, determined shower. Poor Adela! for many weeks past she had denied herself the indulgence even of a threepenny omnibus, always walking to Clapham and back, in order to purchase with the money so saved some little extra comforts for her mother. These long walks in all weathers, however, made sad havoc with her now scanty wardrobe, and especially with her boots and shoes; and to increase her comfort on this day, her feet were wet long before she reached Clapham, and those wet feet she had endured the whole morning, preferring the chance of a dangerous cold, to the humiliation of letting Mrs. Hitchins' servants see what old shoes she was compelled to wear, by putting them off to be dried. Let not the world talk of the sufferings of the needlewoman alone, they are almost equalled by those endured by many a high-bred and accomplished lady, whom distress has forced into the profession of a daily governess, who must attend her pupils in all weathers, and is too often, for the same reason as that which actuated Adela, obliged to sit with wet feet



throughout a whole morning. Upon no woman that ever entered it could the miseries of that dreadful employment have fallen more heavily than on Adela Conyers; for by the capricious kindness of General St. Leger, she had been not only well but luxuriously nurtured; while her delicate frame was not more unfitted for the bodily hardships she encountered, than was her free and noble mind for the meanness, and toadyism which would alone have secured for her anything approaching to comfort. Yet hitherto Adela had borne up bravely, lamenting only over her mother's sufferings, and never thinking that she had too dearly purchased the privilege of rejecting the odious addresses of Colonel Sidney, which had been the primary cause of all that she and her family now endured. But on this day for the first time her courage failed, and the tears stole heavily down her cheeks, as, buffeted by the wind and drenched with rain, she paced wearily down the Clapham-road, and remembered that she would not even have a comfortable meal, or a good fire to cheer her, on reaching her miserable home. Once even on that afternoon, she found herself considering whether it would have been possible to have married the colonel; but the next moment, his age, his fierce, arbitrary temper, his unpleasing features, and sullen manners, rose before her, and she exclaimed, audibly, "Oh, no, no! anything rather than to be his wife—to beg for bread, to starve, to die; oh, my dear mamma, not even for your sake could I have married him!" The shadows of the autumn evening were falling drearily around as Adela entered the street in which she dwelt, and she was somewhat annoyed by the rude manner in which a shabbily dressed man, who was loitering about within a few doors of Mrs. Windsor's house, stared under her bonnet. The indignant air, however, with which she drew back, and fixed

her dark eyes full upon his countenance, seemed to impress the fellow with some sense of his freedom, as he stammered out, "No offence, I hope, Miss; no offence, I suppose, to look at such a pretty gal; one does not see such faces as yours is, Miss, every day in the week!" The fashion in which the man apologized for his rudeness, was scarce less offensive to Adela than the rudeness itself, and bending her head down she hurried home.

"How is mamma?" were the first words of Adela, as Charlotte Windsor opened the door. The young girl shook her head. "Oh, Miss Conyers, she is very ill, indeed; mother says she ought to send for a doctor, who will come to see her at home, instead of going just now and then to a physician, and getting her medicines made up at a druggist's. Mother knows a kind good gentleman, who would never think of sending in a bill till you or Mr. Conyers were quite prepared to pay it. Do let mother go and fetch this gentleman, it will be a great deal better than putting any more money into the pocket of that drinking, gambling fellow of a chemist, Dixon, who was so saucy about the trifle you owe him."

"Well, I will talk about this with your mother, Charlotte," answered Adela; "let me go now and see how poor mamma is."

"She is asleep now, dear Miss Conyers, and mother is watching her," answered Charlotte, "and so tired and ill as you look, the first thing is to make yourself a little comfortable!"

"Do not talk about my looking ill—you are ill yourself, Charlotte," said Adela; "how pale you are, and your eyes are red, and swelled. Have you been crying? Oh, I hope no new trouble has come upon you and your good mother, till

at least we hear from Aubrey, and can pay what we owe you for rent."

"Thank heaven, dear Miss Conyers, you are quite mistaken for once," said Charlotte; "I have not been crying; my eyes are red with the black work, the mourning I have been so busy over; but it is taken home and paid for, and I have paid the nasty poor-rate."

"My God!" ejaculated Adela, "and have you sat up till four in the morning the whole of this week, to work at mourning, that you may take the money produced by your cruel labour, to pay for poor-rates to support other people in idleness? Is this just, is this proper? To my thinking there had better be no poor-rates at all, than that a young creature circumstanced as you are should have to pay them."

"Well, I do own that I think so too, Miss Conyers!" answered Charlotte. "One would not like to be cruel to the poor, knowing so often as we do the want of a meal; but I do think the money for poor-rates should not be taken from such people as mother and myself: it would not be fair to take my money to support those who cannot earn any, even if they were willing to work; but you know the old constable told me, when we had the summons for poor-rate last quarter, that the people who throw themselves on the rate are the most wicked and idle wretches, both men and women; that the decent poor will not ask for parish relief. Well, I do grudge paying the poor-rate, for it would be hard to have to keep other people, and go without myself, even if they were good, let alone to give up my money to keep bad women and tipsy men; however, since it is, that the honest poor must keep the lazy, it is no use to grumble, I suppose. And I will not grumble to night, for I have saved money to

get us a nice little supper, and you must come down into the kitchen, Miss Conyers, because I have got tea ready for you there, and you must take it, and get off your wet things before you go up to your mamma!"

As the good girl spoke thus, she forced Adela down into the kitchen, where the bright fire, with little Henry making toast before it, the kettle simmering on the hob, and the fragrant smell from the teapot, revived even the drooping spirits of poor Adela. Charlotte meanwhile disrobed the young lady of her wet attire as tenderly as if she had been her sister, and when Adela had put on another dress and dry shoes, the young girl, after pouring out a cup of tea, with great importance produced a plate from the little oven beside the stove, where she had kept warm a nicely broiled rasher of ham and two eggs.

"Now, dear Miss Conyers," said the good girl, "you must eat these eggs, and this little bit of ham, and then, with this nice cup of tea, you will be quite strong to sit up with your mamma! Come now, do let me see that you enjoy it, or I shall think you are offended with the liberty I have taken."

"Yes, do eat the eggs, Miss Adela," said little Henry; "they are so nice, and I have made some beautiful toast; see! it is all nice and brown, and not a bit burnt."

Adela Conyers could not at first command her voice to speak; the kindness of this poor girl overcame her more than the insolent tyranny of Mrs. Hitchins. The warm comfortable meal was, however, very acceptable; and after kissing Charlotte, and her little brother, Adela partook of their repast with an appearance of enjoyment which was all the return they asked for. The nice cup of tea, and plate of ham and eggs, were the widow's mite of Charlotte Windsor, for she had really parted with the whole of a week's hard earn-

ings to pay POOR-RATES! Let not this episode be supposed an invention of fancy, such a case as that of Charlotte Windsor actually occurred. An industrious young woman, the main support at the time of her parents and two younger brothers, actually toiled for a week in making mourning, a labour, the nature of which those only who have been engaged in it can conceive, and on the Saturday her earnings, close upon two pounds, were taken by the poor-rate collector, and the young woman and her family had not a meal on the Sunday. At that same time, in that same parish, a woman of infamous character, and a drunkard, by dint of patronage among the guardians, and hypocrisy, obtained from the very rates which that young creature was compelled to pay, twelve pounds per year in money, with three quartern loaves of wheaten bread per week, and a pint of beer each day for her own support! her illegitimate child being placed in a charity school. This case is but one of the many which would justify the middle and respectable portion of the lower classes in exclaiming, "that there had better be no poor-rates at all, than that the industrious and moral poor should be compelled to support the lazy and undeserving!" It was not without bitterness that Charlotte Windsor sacrificed the major part of a week's hard earnings for, as she justly phrased it, "the support of others." She endeavoured, however, to drive the unpleasant subject out of her mind, and while Adela was taking her tea, discussed with her the propriety of sending to the medical man of whom she had spoken, since Mrs. Conyers seemed so very ill. Having finished her tea, Adela was proceeding up stairs to her mother's room, while Charlotte remained busy in the kitchen, when both girls were startled by a violent and long repeated double knock at the house door. Adela naturally quickened her steps for the

purpose of opening the door, though wondering at the same time who could have made so rude and noisy a summons. Her hand had already half drawn back the lock, when it was arrested by the voice of Charlotte, who almost shrieked as she sprang up the stairs, "Oh Miss Conyers, don't open the door. I will answer from the area. It is some wretch or other who comes with such a knock as that!"

Charlotte's long and bitter experience of poverty suggested this fear, and she was too late to prevent the evil she had anticipated. The door which Adela had but half opened was thrust in with such violence, that she was nearly prostrated in the passage ; while a rough brutal voice exclaimed, "How dares yer hobstruct a hoffer in the hexecution of his dooty ? I comes here with a writ of hexecution agin the goods and chattels of one Mrs. Adeler Conyers ! Come in, Summers, hits all right I sees by the looks of the gals !"

The man who spoke thus, and who had now by physical force made his way into the passage, was a corpulent ill-looking fellow, about sixty years of age, with a face bloated and purple with strong drink or an inclination to apoplexy, a halting gait occasioned probably by some hurt in one of his legs, while, to lighten the weight of his body on the infirm member, he used a large stick, by the aid of which he hobbled along. The attire of this man though not absolutely ragged, was dirty and coarse ; his thick nailed shoes seemed not to have had the benefit of blacking for a week ; the front of his greasy coat was covered with Scotch snuff, and altogether he exhaled such an intolerable odour of rum and rank tobacco, that the effluvium alone might have accounted for the pale lip and sickened look with which Adela shrunk back on his approach.

"Lors, my dear !" said the companion whom the fellow had

summoned, and who, on entering the house, had shut the door behind him—"yer need not look so afeard. Men is men, my dear, though they is hoficers and their followers; and neither hi nor my friend here, Mr. Hebenazer Twitchem, would act the leastways himpolite to sich a pretty gal as yer is. Pluck up yer heart, then, my chickabiddy, and let me hold that ere candle or yer'll drop it, and ve shall be all in the dark; and then show us where we can sit down while yer rummages up the money; cause in course sich gintele looking gals vont have their beds taken away, and all for a shabby two pound ten and sixpence!"

"At the suit of Jeremiah Dixon, chemist, for medicines delivered!" said Mr. Twitchem, "and because the said defendant, Hadelor Connors contumulously neglected the horder of the court to pay the said two pounds ten and sixpence to the said Jeremiah Dixon." "Vich Jeremiah Dixon runned away his-self, and didn't pay nobody!" ejaculated Summers by way of parenthesis. "Not even the thirty pounds vot he owed to Mr. Wright the cheesemonger; but that's neither here nor there, seeing as thirty pounds is above the jurisdiction of our court." This follower of the officer of the court of requests was observed by Adela to be the same man whom she had seen loitering in the street on her return from Clapham; and in a less disagreeable moment, the odd contrast which his appearance presented to that of his companion would probably have excited her mirth. This miserable creature, whose clothes, originally much too large for him, were perfectly threadbare, was so thin and haggard, that he would have served excellently well for the representative of the starved apothecary in "Romeo and Juliet," without, in the theatrical phrase, "making up." Indeed, this destitution was so apparent that, had not the malignant pleasure

which he took in the exercise of his abominable trade been apparent also, he might have been regarded as a real object of pity.

Terror meanwhile had absolutely stupified Adela ; but Charlotte Windsor, unhappily too much versed in such scenes, presently recovered her self-possession, and stepping forward, she said, " You have no business here ; Mrs. Conyers occupies furnished lodgings in this house ; there are no goods of hers for you to seize."

" So much the vorse for her then !" said Mr. Twitchem, brutally ; " cause vhy, if there isn't no goods, in course ve must take the voman herself."

An exclamation of horror burst from Adela at these words, and Mrs. Windsor, who had been alarmed by the noise, came running down stairs to know what was the matter. A scene of unimaginable distress ensued ; Adela fainting, poor little Henry crying beside her, his sister provoking the brutal gibes of the men by her useless reproaches of their cruelty, and worse than all, poor Mrs. Conyers herself creeping down stairs half clad, and at the peril of her life.

" I tell yer vot it all is now, my ladies," said the brutal officer, " I isn't going to stand none of this here gammon. I understands the tricks of you females before to-day, and this voman a pretending as she's ill, and thinking to play off being worser if we takes her, and getting a verdict against us for arresting her ven she's sick. But it vont do, if so be she's vell enough to come a running down here in this slap-up sort of style, she's vell enough to go to prison, and there she jogs this here night, unless the young gal her darter finds us the money or the valley on it."

" Now Twitchem, my good fellow, don't go for to be hun-
-lite to the ladies," interposed Summers, " it only scares
- out of their wits, as vun may say, and doesn't do no good ;

cos vhy, they is so frightened they can't think vot they shall do."

"Vell, Summers, I'm sure, as you say," responded Mr. Twitchem, "it alurs goes to my heart to be hard on the vomen ; but vot can ve do in the vay of our dooty ? dooty is above every thing, Summers, and if I were to give in to my good nater as yer would have me do, I should be no better nor a ruined hoffer. Howsomever, they seems such respectable vomen here, that I can't go for to think as they vont raise the two pound ten !"

"Ah, Twitchem!" replied Mr. Summers, sentimentally, "it is a blessed thing, surely, for debtors as has us two to deal with, as your notion of duty alurs keeps my good natur in order, and my good natur hacts in vat they calls the vay of *reciprocity* on your notions of dooty."

Unfortunately for the degree of favour in which the gentlemen were likely to stand with the ladies present, none of the latter were very sufficiently impressed with a sense either of the justice of Mr. Twitchem or the generosity of his companion, two qualities in which those worthies flattered themselves that they specially excelled. Then came a discussion as to the means of satisfying this claim, and Adela remembered that she still had in her possession the piano which had been her delight in happier days. It was, however, dreadful to have the instrument removed to satisfy sô paltry a claim; besides, her very bread depended upon keeping it; but these ruffians would not stir without the amount of their demand, and they now began to grumble fiercely at the delay, and to talk of forcing the swooning Mrs. Conyers from the house. Then came the moment of deepest humiliation for Adela, to implore pity, to ask forbearance from wretches such as these, for now, grown more insolent, they refused to take the piano;

they could fetch no one that night to remove the instrument, and they would have the money and nothing else.

Desperate emergencies inspire a thought of desperate remedies, and when Charlotte named Mrs. Jackson, Adela wondered that she had not thought of her before. Fatigued, ill, horror-stricken as she was, it was then the work only of a few minutes to put on her bonnet and shawl, and sally out into the storms and darkness of the night, in the hope that, in the knowledge of her still possessing her piano, Mrs. Jackson upon that security would advance the trifling sum required.

CHAPTER X.

"All doomed alike to moan,
The feeling for another's woes—
The unfeeling for their own!"

GRAY.

THE excess of Adela Conyers' suffering, perhaps in a certain sense stunned her consciousness of it; and as she groped her way along the dark streets, she found herself unexpectedly wondering what had brought her there. Then the picture of her poor mother, pale, dying almost, and the horrible wretches she had left in the house, rose up before her, and she pressed on, unconscious of the rude jostling of the persons who, in spite of the inclement evening, filled the busy streets of London, and who, if in the glare of a gas lamp they occasionally caught a glimpse of her pale distorted countenance, were very indifferent to miseries not their own. Before Adela left the house, the kind Charlotte had forced into her hand the money to procure a conveyance to Clarges-street, but it was only as the fear that she might not find Mrs. Jackson at home darted across her mind, that Adela remembered this, and hailing the first omnibus that passed, she was soon on her way to Piccadilly, at a rather more rapid rate than that for which she could have taxed her feeble limbs. The rain, which had been falling throughout the day in a kind of thick mist, now poured down in torrents, accompanied by gusts of wind which extinguished many of the lamps, and whistling shrilly round Adela as she descended

from the conveyance, made her shrink and shiver under its biting influence.

On her arrival at the door of Mrs. Jackson, poor Adela paused a moment ere she raised the knocker, in sheer terror lest she should be told the woman was not at home, upon whom rested her sole hope of procuring the money, between three and four pounds, including the expenses necessary for dismissing the wretches who had thrust themselves into the house of Mrs. Windsor. The girl who opened the door knew Adela well, and in reply to her half-articulate inquiry as to whether her mistress were at home, she answered, "Oh yes, Miss Conyers, Missis is at home, but main busy with a new lodger and all, what only came in this afternoon. Howsomever I will go and tell her that you are here, 'cause I heard her say this afternoon that she must call on you to-morrow, as she knows of a lady as wants to learn music and French. Just step into the parlour, Miss, and I'll tell Missis."

The few minutes that elapsed after the girl left the room, seemed an age to the impatient Adela, and when Mrs. Jackson appeared, and taking her by both hands, besought her to say what was the matter, that she looked so pale and ill, it was no wonder that the poor girl took her for one of the kindest and best hearted creatures in the world.

"Oh, deary me, deary me, my dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson, as Adela concluded her relation of the evening's trial; "sure there never was two sweet women in the world tried like you and your dear mamma, and the worst of the matter is, that I have not five pounds in the house, and of course the bankers is closed."

Mrs. Jackson had scraped up money enough to have her account at a banker's, but this was the first time Adela had

heard of it. In the depression of the moment, however, she gave not a thought to this evidence of the easy circumstances of the lodging-house keeper, and only repeated in a sorrowful accent, "Then you cannot assist me, Mrs. Jackson. Oh, I would work for a twelvemonth for any one who would help me in this strait ; and we expect money from Aubrey every day, when we would certainly return the four pounds to any one who would be kind enough to aid us to-night !"

"I do not doubt that, my dear," answered Mrs. Jackson, "I do not doubt it, though a nasty ill-natured woman of the world would say, Oh, yes, and when your brother's money comes, you will have so many other things to pay, that you will not be able to look to this ; for ten or fifteen pounds won't do the work of thirty. However, thank Heaven, I never make such calculations ; besides, I have heard of a pupil for you, who will pay better than that Mrs. Hitchins at Clapham, and you could pay me back out of your salary !"

"Indeed I could, dear Mrs. Jackson !" said Adela ; "but oh, you see the misfortune is, we have so little time ; those horrid men say they must have the money to-night !"

Now the fact was, that though Mrs. Jackson spoke for once in her life the pure truth, when she said that she had not five pounds in the house, yet she knew very well that she could advance to Adela the required sum, as, her new lodger having come in suddenly, and without a reference, Mrs. Jackson had demanded to be paid in advance, and was indeed just about to receive the money, when informed by her servant that Miss Conyers wished to speak with her directly, and seemed, as the girl said, in great trouble. To do Mrs. Jackson justice, she resolved to lend the young girl the money, but it pleased her to make the most of her kindness, and pretend that it put her to her wit's end. With

this object, she again burst into a string of lamentations over Adela's ill fortune, and concluded as if a sudden thought had struck her : " I tell you what it is, my dear ; it breaks my heart to think of sending you back without the money ; and though it is not pleasant, it has just struck me I may get it for you ; stay here for a few minutes, I wont keep you long."

With these words Mrs. Jackson hurried out of the room, leaving Adela in total ignorance of her real design, and to a suspense of nearly twenty minutes' duration, in which brief space, however, she had not only made her new lodger, a perfect stranger, cognizant of the painful situation of Miss Conyers, but also impressed that lady with an idea that she, Mrs. Jackson, was one of the most amiable of women.

At the expiration of the time mentioned, Adela was requested by the servant to walk up stairs, but the joy which she would have felt at seeing five sovereigns laid out upon the drawing-room table was somewhat deteriorated, when she observed a tall, beautiful woman, a total stranger, sitting on the sofa with Mrs. Jackson.

" Well, my sweet darling," said Mrs. Jackson, rising and kissing Adela, as she presented her with the money ; " you must not be hurt that I have let this dear lady, my new lodger, know a little of your trouble ; since, as I had not so much cash at hand as you wanted, I have got it from her."

Adela cast down her eyes, and felt her cheeks burn, as she murmured her thanks in a broken voice ; she was too proud and too sensitive not to feel a bitter shame at her poverty. If anything, however, could have robbed her humiliation of its sting, it would have been the sweet and trembling manner with which the stranger hastened to stop her thanks, and assert that she was herself the obliged



ADELA AT MRS GRIMSBY'S.

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party. "I assure you, Miss Conyers," she said, "I could almost be cruel enough to feel glad of the event which, though so untoward for you, I must consider fortunate for myself, since it has given me the pleasure of being introduced to you ; for you will be my friend, I am sure you will. I have no friends in London, and I shall be so glad, so happy, if you will come and see me, and introduce me to your mamma. I shall be the obliged person, I assure you, for I had contemplated being very dull in London, till the arrival of Mr. Rushton, my husband ; and I am not accomplished, either, I have only been educated in the country ; so that if you have nothing better to do with your time, and would give me some instructions, I should be additionally obliged to you."

Young, and, despite her poverty, yet inexperienced in the ways of the world as was Adela Conyers, the gentle and almost supplicating manner in which the stranger thus addressed her appeared very extraordinary, and contrasted almost painfully with the imposing and queen-like beauty of her person. Adela Conyers was herself very lovely, but perhaps the decided difference between her own personal attractions and those of Mrs. Rushton increased her admiration of that lady. Adela might have been taken for a model of sweet English beauty. A complexion in which the pink and white of her native hawthorn was delicately mingled ; eyes of so deep and dark a blue, that beneath the shadow of their long lashes they might have been mistaken for black ; small straight features, and an abundance of dark auburn hair—real auburn hair, the most beautiful that can decorate the head of woman ; the deep rich brown of the chesnut, with a red sunbeam playing over it. The figure of Adela too, though small, was perfect, she was a veritable Titania, graceful and flexible as a willow wand. An admirable representative

would she have made for one of the beloved heroines of Shakspeare, "Imogene," or "Viola," with their touch of sorrow ; not enough of *heart's ease* for "sweet Anne Page."

A perfect contrast to all these delicate attractions were those of Mrs. Rushton ; of so lofty a stature that the admirable proportions of her figure only just rescued it from the censure of being too tall, the outline of her features was so classically severe, the fire of her large black eyes so deep and so intense, that Adela felt a kind of painful wonder as to the circumstances which led a person of such imperious aspect to address those tender supplicating tones to her. The purity of Adela was so unspotted even in thought, that she was incapable of suspecting frailty in another ; but had her thoughts been those of the most hacknied worldling, she might have hesitated to suspect aught ill of Mrs. Rushton. When she gazed upon her polished marble brow, with its raven locks folded smoothly round it, and the eyes which had swam in tears for her sorrows, now shining as serene, as brilliantly beneath it.

Mrs. Rushton accompanied Adela to the door of the drawing-room, and tenderly pressing her hand, she whispered, "I hope you are not offended, Miss Conyers, at the freedom with which I have spoken to you as a stranger, and I hope you will allow me to come with Mrs. Jackson tomorrow, and see your mamma. I am rather peculiarly circumstanced, but I will explain all to her ; and I should be so happy to make your acquaintance!"

To such a request, so preferred, and from a person whose kindness had enabled her to return home with so light a heart, it may be readily believed that Adela gave a joyful assent, for she clearly understood that the five pounds had been advanced by Mrs. Rushton ; and had she entertained any

doubt upon the subject it would have been removed by Mrs. Jackson, who, as they proceeded down the stairs, exclaimed about the generosity of her new lodger. "Only think, my dear Miss Conyers," she said, "she would not let *me* lend you the money; but when I told her how I meant to employ her first week's rent, she said she must rob me of that pleasure, as it would be but too agreeable to herself to assist so amiable a young lady as I described you. And you see too, my dear, she talks of taking lessons from you; and then there is Mrs. Mildmay, that I told you of; not that she is such a sweet creature as Mrs. Rushton seems to be, but she will pay you well, my dear, and that you know is the great point." Mrs. Jackson, who was in high good humour, possibly because she had assisted Adela at her lodger's expense, insisted upon sending a servant for a cab to carry the young girl home, and forced upon her a few extra shillings to pay the fare.

How differently do the elements affect us, according to the state of our nerves! little recked Adela Conyers now, as the vehicle rattled quickly through the almost deserted streets, of the howling wind or driving rain, for she bore with her the means of dismissing the wretches who had invaded the sanctity of her home; and the sweetness of Mrs. Rushton's manners had divested the favour of all that was humiliating to its object; and Adela would not think, in her deep thankfulness to Heaven for this unexpected relief, that her mother's health would suffer from the terror which she had experienced. Then there was the new pupil, too, and Mrs. Rushton would take lessons of her; what a happy Sunday she and her mother would have after all with the poor Windsors! We are not always disappointed in our hopes, otherwise we could not live. The first person who came bounding to Mrs. Windsor's door in answer to the noisy summons of the cab-man, was little

Henry, who almost screamed in his delight. "Oh, Miss Adela, there has been a letter from your brother with an order in it ; it ought to have come last night ; we can send away those nasty dirty fellows to-morrow, when you will have lots of money !"

"We will send them away to-night, Henry dear !" said Adela, as she proceeded into the parlour where the two ruffians were still waiting, and told down the required sum, which they took in sulky silence, as little Henry had let them know the contents of Aubrey's letter so soon as he heard them himself, which was directly the postman delivered it, and that was not half an hour after Adela's departure ; and Mrs. Conyers had, of course, no secrets under such circumstances with her good landlady.

An hour after the departure of the two officers, Charlotte Windsor went down stairs to summon her brother to go out with her to purchase the materials for a little supper, when a sharp gust of wind nearly extinguished her candle as she opened the parlour door, and she found the boy Henry with a bason in his hand sprinkling the room with a liquid which the strong smell showed to be lavender water.

"What are you about, Henry ?" said the young girl. "Fetch that candle out of the fireplace where you have put it, to waste in the draught, and come with me to buy some oysters to stew for Mrs. Conyers' supper."

"In a minute, Charlotte dear !" answered the boy. "You see Miss Conyers gave me a shilling out of that money she brought home, and I thought, as she said the pretty lady who gave it to her was coming here to-morrow, it would not be nice for the parlour to smell of those nasty men, and their rum and tobacco, for you know you said yourself they did smell of rum and tobacco ; so out of my shilling I just went

and bought six pennyworth of lavender water, to sweeten our parlour."

There was great mirth at the supper of stewed oysters as to Henry's mode of purifying the parlour, contaminated by the presence of Mr. Twitchem and his assistant: it is surprising how our troubles furnish us with laughter, *when they are past*. Henry was not suffered to pay for the lavender water. That power which "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb" bore Mrs. Conyers through the excitement of that evening; she was not worse for it; and oh what fervent prayers did she and Adela breathe for their new friend that night. We have yet to learn how far Mrs. Rushton shared in the faults and follies of human nature, from which the purest are not free: but if "charity covereth a multitude of sins," oh, blessedly were her frailties screened beneath that veil!

CHAPTER XI.

"Be not deceived ; if I have veiled my look,
I turn the trouble of my countenance
Merely upon myself. Vex'd I am
Of late with passions of some difference ;
Conceptions only proper to myself."

JULIUS CÆSAR.

ABOUT a fortnight had elapsed since Aubrey's introduction to Edmund Conyers, and during that period he had been introduced at Allerdale Castle, and had become almost domesticated at Ravensglas ; for in the prostration of spirits which succeeded Mr. Musgrave's severe attack, the presence and conversation of Aubrey were a better restorative than any medicines the physicians could prescribe.

As to Edmund Conyers, he complained very bitterly, half in jest and half in earnest, that Mr. Musgrave so much monopolized his new friend ; it is true the long *tête-à-têtes* of Aubrey and the old man left Ellinor more than usually at leisure, but Edmund did not take advantage of this opportunity for pressing his suit or exhibiting any lover-like attentions ; indeed the absolute indifference which mutually existed between the young man and his *fiancée*s must have been evident to Aubrey, even though his penetration had not been, perhaps rather unfortunately, sharpened upon that subject ; as it was, he had reason to find fault with himself that with each succeeding day he felt less inclined to respond to the attachment which Edmund appeared to have conceived for him, and which, perhaps, originated in the very contrast which the

reflecting and somewhat severe character of Aubrey offered to the frivolity of his own. If, however, Aubrey censured himself for the kind of reserve he could not help feeling towards Edmund Conyers, he had at least no such uneasiness of conscience as regarded Lord Allerdale and his second son. The Baron himself was strictly polite, and so indeed was Mr. Francis; but though their politeness was absolutely free from the superciliousness which Edmund had assumed towards the lieutenant on the night of their first meeting, it was so cold, so stately, and so chilling, that it was impossible that its recipient should for one moment forget the inferiority of his own position, or the advantages of theirs. So much, indeed, had Aubrey felt repulsed by the formalities of Lord Allerdale and his son Francis, that, apart from all other more agreeable inducements, he had been inclined to prolong his stay at Ravenglas for the mere purpose of avoiding a visit to the Castle, which Edmund insisted that he should make. Against this visit, however, he had no longer any excuse, as Mr. Musgrave was nearly recovered, and Edmund had brought a note from the stately Lord Allerdale himself, inviting Conyers to a dinner, at which the lieutenant-colonel and some of the officers of his own regiment were to be present, together with some of the most distinguished persons of the county.

The morning of this dinner-party, though cold, was clear and bright, and might have inspired the spirit of cheerfulness as readily as the fairest day in summer. Small influence, however, had the sparkling sunbeams on the mood of the haughty proprietor of Allerdale, as with a brow dark as a December midnight he rose from the table on which some old and faded parchments were spread, which he had been closely examining, and paced thoughtfully up and down his apartment. That private chamber of Lord Allerdale was a

perfect repository of everything rich and rare; there were cabinet paintings, perfect gems of art, collected at an enormous price from almost every country in Europe; vases of the most costly Chinese porcelain; a magnificent collection of gold and silver coins, stored in ivory cabinets also of Chinese workmanship, the size and exquisite carving of which rendered them of great value; there, too, were groups in Parian marble, admirably modelled from the antique. Among these peaceful specimens of luxury and taste, there were also various destructive weapons, remarkable for the beauty of their workmanship or the richness of their material. Thus there was disposed under a glass case an ancient Toledo sword, with a baldric thickly studded with jewels, the property, in the old time, of a stout baron of Allerdale, and a most valued heirloom among his descendants; and on a marble table near it, and disposed in like manner under a glass case, was a trophy of oriental arms, a sabre, and daggers with their hilts and scabbards set thick with gems. An elegant bookcase in this room, too, contained some of Lord Allerdale's favourite authors, whose works he chose to enjoy in this apartment, more particularly devoted to his own use than the magnificent library, which was always open to his sons, or any guests who might happen to be at the castle.

The walls of this chamber, the better to give effect to the splendid paintings that decorated them, were stained of a grey neutral tint, with a rich border of carnation colour and gold. The window curtains and the cushions of the couches and chairs were of carnation-coloured satin. The luxurious lounge which Lord Allerdale was accustomed to draw near the fire was, however, now impatiently pushed aside, and there was a look of anxiety and even nervous apprehension depicted on his features as he paced up and down the apart-

ment, which would have surprised those accustomed to recoil before his frigid and irrepressible pride. Pausing at length in his monotonous walk, Lord Allerdale stood with folded arms, contemplating the magnificent park, which, with its avenues, of trees, the growth of centuries, its graceful undulations of hill and dale, its groups of reclining deer, and its broad sheets of water, stretched before the windows of his apartment. The prospect was one to flatter the man's natural pride, for he stood there in his gorgeous chamber, the lord of all the fair lands for many a mile around. No expression of triumphant pride was there in the lowering brow, the sinister glare of the dark eye, or the pale quivering lip with which Lord Allerdale turned from the window and murmured, with a bitter sigh, "I could not bear it! No; this new-sprung danger must be trodden down at any cost; besides, there is no real injustice in the case; we miss not that which we have never enjoyed: I know not, either, how far the danger extends, or if any real danger exists at all. Benedict, with his matchless craft, might learn indeed; but upon this point I have hitherto forborne to make a confidant even of him; yet I know not why I should hesitate, for we are marvellously well understood by each other, and quite secure against any breach of faith, since there is not an unpleasant revelation for either to venture which could not be outfaced by some equally distasteful avowals of the other. The fellow has been exceedingly useful to me for many a long year, that I must own; but what a scourge is his covert insolence, his avarice, the freedom of his manner, nay, the very necessity for constant contact with such a being. Poh! how I hate him!"

A knock at the door interrupted these meditations of the Baron of Allerdale, and Mr. Nicholas Benedict himself was

announced. The peer and the lawyer met with every outward demonstration of respect on the one side, and patronizing friendship on the other; but no sooner had the servant withdrawn than the frown returned to the brow of Lord Allerdale, and he said, in a cold, satirical voice—

“May I be permitted to ask, Mr. Benedict, by what strange accident it was that you failed to keep your appointment with me a fortnight since? I sat up till four o’clock in the morning, expecting to see you return from Ravenglas with the papers which you know to be of such importance to us both. You did not, however, appear; and the next morning I learned that you had quitted Ravenglas at an early hour for London!”

“Sorely against my will, my dear lord,” answered Benedict; “but I think,” he added, with a sneer, “it would scarce have better suited your lordship’s purpose than my own if I had called in the medical practitioner of the good town of Allerdale to dress the wound which I received in my quest after those same infernal papers, and therefore I had but to bear my anguish as best I could during the night, and set off with the break of day for London!”

A strange sort of smile played round the lips of Lord Allerdale as the lawyer spoke.

“Ah!” he said, “I remember, now. Francis slept at Ravenglas, too, on that night, and he told me of a disturbance which had arisen in the apprehension that burglars had broken into the house, and how some unlawful intruder had certainly been wounded by a gallant officer in her majesty’s service, one Lieutenant Aubrey Conyers, a very handsome and accomplished gentleman, whom my very wise son Edmund chose to introduce to Richard Musgrave and his niece.”

The frown on the brow of Lord Allerdale was something

benevolent and agreeable in comparison with the smile that curled the lip of Mr. Benedict, at this allusion to Aubrey Conyers, but his tones were quite calm and measured as he said, "I have read somewhere, my lord, that it is the lot of all human beings at times, during the course of this very precarious mortal life, to meet with those whom an intuitive conviction at once assures them, are to exercise a great influence on their destiny, either for good or ill: this kind of conviction fastened on me the moment I was introduced to Lieutenant Conyers; but when I tell your lordship that I was the person whom in his knight-errantry he wounded, you may judge what is the nature of the influence he is likely to exercise over my affairs."

"Well," replied Lord Allerdale, drily, "I am, I acknowledge, no more prepossessed in this gentleman's favour than you are, but we will speak of him presently. Tell me, now, how stand matters with Richard Musgrave. I have paid him but a formal visit since his illness, and you know it is settled that our very pleasant business transactions should pass through your hands. I apprehend, from the condition to which he has been reduced, that he is no less weak-minded and physically nervous than he has ever been—no less calculated to remain the tool which we have so often found him."

"Your conjectures are correct, my lord," answered Benedict; "his nervous debility is pitiable; it was with the greatest difficulty that I prevailed on him to accompany me to the chambers leading to the 'Agnes Tower,' and they were his cries, in the fit which was brought on by his agitation, that alarmed Lieutenant Conyers."

"But the documents, my dear Benedict, I hope you secured them?" said Lord Allerdale, anxiously.

"Indeed, my lord, I did not," answered the lawyer; "and

therein consisted the most vexatious circumstance of the night, for I had not yet secured them when the disturbance took place, and so closely was I pursued through the apartments by Mr. Conyers, that I was fain to beat a retreat through the passage communicating with Lady Geraldine's boudoir—a necessity which, you may be sure, I did not find very agreeable.”

A visible shudder passed through the frame of Benedict as he uttered these last words, and his face grew slightly paler. The sneer became more bitter on the lip of Lord Allerdale as he noted this emotion on the part of his companion, and he said, scoffingly, “Why, Benedict, my excellent Benedict, are you too, with your nerves of steel, going to give way to the vapours and tremblings of our moral and religious friend, Richard Musgrave himself?”

“Your lordship is at an advantage in ridiculing feelings which you avoid the chance to comprehend,” answered the lawyer; “but I question whether your nerves would have proved firmer than mine were, had you in the like manner been compelled to grope your way through those horrible passages in the dead hours of the night, for the first time, too, during fifteen years,—the first time since that night which you, my lord, should remember no less than I.”

“I remember it very well,” returned Lord Allerdale; “but you must permit me to doubt whether I should be so fooled by my senses that a dark room or a dismal passage, even though they were the scenes of that same night's catastrophe could invest the recollection of it with any disagreeables which I do not equally experience here, in my own chamber, surrounded with light and comfort.”

“We cannot, however, always remain free from the government of fancy, or, however wise, always hold ourselves secure

from external impressions," answered Benedict. "You know, Lord Allerdale, that I am not a superstitious man, yet as I crept through those dismal, long deserted rooms, the scene of past years was visibly present,—those infuriated men, that pale, distracted woman, and, more horrible than all, the ghastly, warm, bleeding burthen which *we* were compelled to be the bearers of,—I saw it, my lord, I saw it, muffled up in the dark mantle, hideously indistinct in form, and stretched before my very feet!"

"You must indeed have been the fool of fancy, Benedict," said Lord Allerdale, bitterly; "these apprehensions are ominous, no doubt, my old friend, and I should recommend you to pause in the career which we have pursued so successfully—pause now, at the very hour when our dearest projects approach fulfilment. It were so wisely and worthily done, to surrender all we have so terribly fought for at the suggestion of fancies more absurd than any that harass the half-crazed Richard Musgrave himself."

"You are too severe, my lord," answered Benedict. "I meant but to remark how all, even the strongest and boldest among us, are at times overcome by externals; but were I eternally the dupe of these fancies, as in the general way I am wholly free from them, be assured they would not make me falter in the execution of our plans."

"Now you speak more like yourself, Benedict," answered Lord Allerdale. "I should indeed as soon have expected a half-starved tiger to relinquish his prey, as for you to abandon either your advancement or your revenge."

"I thank your lordship for the comparison, unsavoury as it may sound," retorted Benedict. "There are creatures more odious than the tiger, which is a magnificent brute, let the world say against him what it will."

"Now, then, for the matter in hand, if you please," said Lord Allerdale, not choosing to notice the irritation of manner with which Benedict had last spoken. "About those documents ; when will you procure them ?"

"So soon as Musgrave is thoroughly recovered ; he promised me so much, when I saw him in the morning after my unlucky adventure. He says he will procure them himself."

"That I should think unlikely," answered Lord Allerdale, "since he was too much overcome by his absurd superstitions even to traverse those apartments in your company."

"Even so, my lord," said the lawyer ; "there is, however, a position which affords only a choice of evils, and you may be sure I made the most of those which surround Richard Musgrave. I think he will rather himself brave the terrors of those apartments, than abandon them to the investigation of the strangers who may come into possession of the house."

"You have, then, fully possessed him with the belief that it is on sufferance only that he remains yet a little longer the nominal proprietor of Ravenglas?" said Lord Allerdale.

"Most fully, my lord," replied Benedict, "and I carefully concealed from him your lordship's intention of taking entire possession of the house and valuables. I even ventured so far as to say that your large advances to Mr. Musgrave, and the extravagance of Mr. Edmund, had so far impaired your resources, as to make the most rigorous economy necessary, as the sole means of avoiding very serious embarrassment. Your lordship may be satisfied, too, that I lost not so fine an opportunity of enlarging on the generosity of your proposals with regard to Miss Ellinor, who I reminded Mr. Musgrave you were eager, though utterly portionless, to receive as your daughter. I was the more willing to insist upon this point,

because the young lady has chosen to indulge in airs towards myself, which I think very little becoming to her situation."

"Ah, my good Benedict," said Lord Allerdale, with a malignant bitterness of accent, "those dainty airs are a trick which has descended to Ellinor Musgrave from her charming mother, and she must pay the penalty for both—for her mother's insolence no less than for her own."

"Miss Ellinor and Mr. Edmund promise to make an admirably fashionable couple," said Benedict; "they are sublimely indifferent to each other."

"I shall be quite satisfied if that indifference continues," returned Lord Allerdale; "the marriage of Ellinor with my eldest son has, you know, for years past, been a growing necessity. I hope only that the folly of Edmund may not change her indifference into absolute dislike: his best chance is in the continuance of her indifference towards others, no less than towards himself. Ellinor is a girl of strong imagination and lively feelings; she will never care for Edmund, but so soon as she learns to love another she will hate him. It was that which should have been avoided, and for which I so strongly condemn his folly in introducing at Ravenglas this Lieutenant Conyers, who is a person very likely to captivate a romantic dreaming girl such as Ellinor."

A bitterly malignant expression settled on the lawyer's features as Lord Allerdale spoke, but his voice sunk almost to a whisper as he replied,

"Your lordship apprehends, I suspect, that the introduction of Miss Musgrave to this young man may prove prejudicial to your projects; and indeed it seems to me that these apprehensions are not incorrect, and the young lady is of a character so determined, that, under the influence of a fancied attachment to this Lieutenant Conyers, she is not

unlikely to refuse altogether to fulfil the contract with Mr. Edmund ; and, for my part, I have no faith in that filial affection for her uncle which might prevent such a step ; 'tis an old tale how a young lady can abandon even a father in such a case, and what can an uncle expect more ? Yet cannot your lordship learn some particulars of this Lieutenant Conyers ? A subaltern in a marching regiment, I dare swear that he is poor, and the poor have so many assailable points ; nay, he is poor, I am certain, for only the consciousness of poverty could have made a man of his attainments wince, as I observed he did, when Musgrave, with his usual folly upon the subject, asked him from what branch of the Conyers' family he was descended."

"Musgrave asked him that, did he ?" said Lord Allerdale, quickly ; "and what, pray, was his reply ?"

"Oh !" returned the lawyer, with a sneer, "he was ridiculously embarrassed, and muttered something about his family having been for some two or three generations settled in France ; but the topic was so palpably unpleasant to him, that Miss Ellinor, with that amiable courtesy which was quite striking in her conduct towards him, immediately turned the conversation."

It was only as he ceased speaking that the lawyer, who had been trifling with a paper-knife that lay on the table, happened to raise his eyes to the face of Lord Allerdale, and so shocked was he at the fixed, horror-stricken glance of the nobleman's eye, and the livid paleness that overspread his features, that, uttering an exclamation of alarm, he started from his chair, and was about to ring the bell for assistance. Lord Allerdale, however, restrained him, by a motion of his hand. "It is nothing, Benedict," he said ; "a strange kind of pain across the heart, which has attacked me two or three

times of late. You will find some wine there in that closet; give me a glass of it, and I shall be better."

Benedict fetched the wine, but as he marked the trembling hand with which Lord Allerdale lifted it to his lips, he said, "Excuse me, my lord, but I think such attacks as these ought not to be disregarded; have you taken any medical advice respecting them?"

"Not yet, nor is it necessary, they are so brief," answered Lord Allerdale; "and you know I hate physicians, and their quackeries, and never apply to them but on absolute compulsion; but it is over; I am better now. What were we talking about? Oh, of this Lieutenant Conyers; and so he said that his family came from France?"

"Yes, my lord," returned the lawyer, "and he really quite relieved me by the acknowledgment, for I apprehended from his name that he might claim to be some cousin of your lordship's; and as I was at the same time pretty certain that he would not prove a rich one, I could not forget that poor cousins are the very bane of persons of your distinguished class."

Lord Allerdale had now regained all his aristocratic composure, and fixing his eyes keenly on Benedict's face, he said, in a measured tone, "There, Benedict, is the very point. I think it not impossible this young man may pretend to a relationship, for you must now become acquainted, my good friend, with a little piece of my family history, which was really too trifling for me to have mentioned to you, except for the odd coincidence of this young man's name, and his declaration that his family were for some time settled in France. You must know, then, that my father, before I was born (I believe even before his marriage), was for a brief space much annoyed by letters and applications from some impostor in

France, who, having assumed the name of Conyers, or really possessing it, chose therefrom to fabricate a claim upon the barony itself, by pretending that he was descended from some elder branch of our family, I believe in the reign of some of the last Plantagenets, or the Tudors at latest ; though I really cannot tax my memory even as to the race of the sovereigns who were named."

"How, then, did the matter end, my lord?" inquired Mr. Benedict ; "a fellow who had the cunning as well as impudence to put forward such a claim, would not be likely very lightly to abandon it."

"Certainly not," answered Lord Allerdale ; "but the monstrous nature of the man's dishonesty was, I think you will see, sufficiently evidenced by the fact that after some sharp letters had passed between him and my father, he suddenly dropped the correspondence."

"Have any of those letters passed into your lordship's possession?" inquired Benedict.

"No, indeed ; my father did not think it worth while to preserve them," answered Lord Allerdale. "I wish he had done so, though, for I should like to have seen how this absurd claim was made out."

"Indeed, it is a pity that the letters were not preserved," said the lawyer, drily ; "it is always best to know the ground upon which our enemies take their stand. But with regard to Lieutenant Conyers, your lordship apprehends, perhaps, that he may be a descendant of the very impostor by whom your noble father was annoyed? well, I dare say we might ascertain that."

"Oh, it is a matter scarce worth alluding to," said the Baron, with a slight laugh ; "'twas the coincidence that struck

me; and this young man is so very reserved upon the subject of his family."

"Which he would be, of course, if he entertained a project so impudently nefarious as that to which your lordship alludes," replied the lawyer; "his object very likely is to worm himself into the confidence of Mr. Edmund, and glean from him such matters of family history as may help out his own designs."

Mr. Benedict really said what he thought, for, like all bad men, he judged others by himself; he knew how he would have acted in the position of Aubrey Conyers, supposing the latter really to entertain such a design as that of which Lord Allerdale had spoken.

"Well, well, my dear Benedict," said Lord Allerdale, with an endeavour to assume an air of amiable candour, "we are perhaps, after all, very much wronging this poor young man, who has probably never heard of the villanous imposture of which I spoke."

"Nevertheless," answered Benedict, in his dry judicial tone, "we may as well learn who he is. I believe that the colonel of his regiment dines here to-day, my lord, does he not? Does your lordship know the character of that gentleman?"

"I know nothing about the man," answered Lord Allerdale, superciliously.

"Then I do," returned the lawyer. "I have met him often in London; he is a man of considerable wealth, if not very distinguished origin, for his father was a linen draper; he has a very fine person, is a devoted admirer of fair ladies, has most obsequious manners for persons who are his superiors in rank, and is insulting and domineering over all below him; in fact, he has about him as little of the real gentleman as is

possible for a person who has enjoyed every advantage which money, some natural ability, and a first-rate education can procure."

"You have an instinctive perception of character, my dear Benedict," said Lord Allerdale, "but even my slight observation justifies your remarks; and in addition I think I may add, that Colonel Colman is in all respects, both in mind and person, though they are both very handsome men, the direct contrast of Lieutenant Conyers."

"Exactly so, my lord," replied Benedict, "and such contrasts never exist without a corresponding antipathy. I am satisfied that in their secret hearts, without perhaps being aware of it, Mr. Conyers and Colonel Colman hate each other with a perfect hatred. The malevolence of this hatred, however, will all rest with the Colonel, for Mr. Conyers is in every respect of mind, person, and manners, his superior; indeed, he is so thoroughly a gentleman, that really, my lord, I think we may say, he *might be* the heir of Allerdale, without disparagement to that high dignity, at which we do not intend he should by any means arrive. This dislike, then, of his Colonel, is so largely mingled with contempt, that it can have but little bitterness; but Colonel Colman's hatred of his subordinate has all the rancour of envy: it is, then, to his weakness and bad feelings that I shall address myself to learn as much as he can tell of Lieutenant Conyers. It may not be impossible even to get up some little dispute in which the subaltern will be the sufferer, for I candidly own, that it seems to me this Mr. Conyers is best out of the way."

"But, my dear Benedict," again interposed the nobleman, "you will remember I wish for no injustice; this young man, as I said before, may be wholly unconnected with the imposture of which I have spoken."

"Ay, ay," said Benedict, "I shall not forget justice ; when was that forgotten, my dear lord, in our transactions ? I will have as much regard for it in the matter of Mr. Conyers as we have ever shown, and I am sure, my lord, you will be content with that."

"Unquestionably so, my good Benedict," answered Lord Allerdale. "But there is the first dinner-bell ; we shall just have time to dress. But before you go, Benedict, tell me, when do you intend to visit our recluse, our friend among the hills ? whose fate is of so much importance to us. We must not forget him in this little affair of Lieutenant Conyers."

"I never forget him, my lord," answered Benedict, while that shudder which had marked the opening of his interview with Lord Allerdale again passed over his frame : "the weather promises to be clear, and I will see him to-night. But though I wish not to boast of my own courage or endurance, let me tell you, my lord, it requires some share of both to venture a midnight solitary ride among those hills, to encounter wretches by the way whose aspect and habits pronounce them aliens to all our received ideas of humanity, and, worse than all, to bear the brunt of his frenzy and horror who we may pronounce as the most hapless and miserable of men."

"Really, Benedict," said Lord Allerdale, "you grow romantic. Since when have you imbibed this sympathy with that worthless and unhappy wretch ? Have a care ; compassion in his regard may be dangerous."

"I know it, my lord," replied the lawyer, "and you need not fear for my discretion. I am not in the habit of suffering my heart to govern my head ; that is not a fault imputed to men of my profession. And be assured I will wear my heart in my head in the matter of Mr. Aubrey Conyers ; for, observe,

my lord, he has injured me, and I hate him ! You may trust my hate."

" Indeed I do," responded Lord Allerdale ; and the two, the peer and the lawyer, shook hands and separated.

In passing to his chamber to dress for dinner, Mr. Benedict was compelled to cross the picture-gallery, and as he entered it, the sound of laughing and merry voices met his ears. A gay group was assembled there, the most distinguished noblemen and gentlemen and ladies of the county, who were visiting at Allerdale, and whom the thoughtless Edmund Conyers had summoned to the picture-gallery, to note the striking resemblance between his new friend Lieutenant Conyers and his venerable ancestor Sir Marmaduke.

Against his will, Aubrey was compelled to stand side by side with the portrait of the valiant cavalier who fell at the fatal fight of Marston ; and " lords and ladies gay" alike decided that, with the ancient costume, the embroidery, and the plumes, and the point lace, he might have been the original Sir Marmaduke himself. There were some present, however, who held not the matter so lightly as those who laughed and complimented Aubrey upon his resemblance to one of the most illustrious of the old Lords of Allerdale, and these last were Richard Musgrave, his niece Ellinor, and Colonel Colman. Richard looked surprised and grave, Ellinor very sad, and Colonel Colman turned from the company with a heart swelling with rancour, because a poor lieutenant of his regiment had, by the chance of an extraordinary resemblance, become associated with the legends of a noble family, and excited the attention of a gay and distinguished circle.

Mr. Benedict would fain have slipped across the gallery without noticing any of the company, but the quick eye of Edmund caught a glance of his retreating form, and he called

him loudly by name. "Now," he said to the mirthful circle, "we will have the opinion of our chancellor that is to be. Now, Mr. Benedict, look at this living Mr. Conyers, and the portrait of my revered ancestor, and tell me whether in the days of witchcraft we should not have been justified in laying an indictment against this gallant officer, for assuming the form and features of that famous old cavalier?"

Mr. Benedict looked from the portrait to Aubrey, and from Aubrey to the portrait, and, for once surprised out of himself, he murmured,—“The resemblance is indeed extraordinary,” and passed from the gay throng with a meditative air, that greatly contributed to their mirth. On reaching his own chamber, Mr. Benedict stood for a minute with his hand resting on the toilet table, and his eyes fixed upon the mirror, but there was no “speculation” in their gaze, though a bitter malignant smile played round his lip as he exclaimed aloud, “He *is* the heir, and Lord Allerdale knows it!”

CHAPTER XII.

"She was a form of life and light,
That, seen, became a part of sight
And rose, where'er I turned mine eye,
The morning star of memory."

THE GIAOUR.

THE dinner at Lord Allerdale's was succeeded by a ball, to which was invited a large assemblage of the gentry of the neighbourhood, not sufficiently distinguished by their wealth or social position to be included among the dinner guests of the haughty peer, though his desire of securing their political influence in behalf of his son Francis compelled him to some show of courtesy. The extreme gaiety of the scene, however, little suited the weak health and despondent spirit of Richard Musgrave. But he knew that the entertainment was given by Lord Allerdale with an understanding that he should appear at it, and to give authority to the already well-spread report of the engagement between his niece and Edmund Conyers.

Hard, and cold, and selfish as the world may be, there is yet a charm about a truly kind and generous spirit which evokes kindness in return, and the appearance of Richard Musgrave in society was hailed with a warmth of congratulation that was almost painful to him ; and from these congratulations he was glad to withdraw to the comparative quiet of a small drawing-room contiguous to the ball-room, opening into a magnificent conservatory, which again, by a broad flight of marble steps, communicated with the park.

The courtesies of fashionable society, as polished and as

cold as ice, admirably well suited the relations of Edmund Conyers and Ellinor Musgrave. Had they really felt for each other the preference of which neither party had a particle, it would have been *mauvais ton* to have discovered it. As the matter really stood, however, they were freed from the necessity of hypocrisy, and after opening the ball with Ellinor, Edmund felt himself at perfect liberty to devote himself for the rest of the evening to the pretty girls who were present, and who, elated by his flattery, exhibited a liveliness which in his esteem contrasted very agreeably with the pensive and almost reserved manners of Ellinor. On her part, after giving her hand in the dance successively to Colonel Colman and Aubrey, Ellinor left the ball-room in search of her uncle, on account of whose health she somewhat feared the exertion of the evening. The heart of Ellinor was little interested in the scene around her; she had been conscious for the last few days of a growing sense of unhappiness, a strengthening aversion to the union with Edmund, and she dreaded to ask herself the cause; for the clear intellect of Ellinor would not leave her in any delusion as to her feelings; and more than once the painful, almost humiliating thought, that she was beginning to love Aubrey Conyers, had already obtruded itself on her mind, and she determined that her reason, which showed her the danger she was incurring, should also overcome it. Alas! poor Ellinor, why did she feel mortified, humiliated! Aubrey Conyers was in every way worthy of a true-hearted and high-minded woman's love; but was she not awarding to him her affections unsought? did he or would he love her in return, if there were no engagement with the heir of Lord Allerdale? that, though she was not herself wholly aware of it, was the question that most troubled Ellinor.

There was no one in the little drawing-room when she entered it, and apprehending that her uncle might have gone into the conservatory, she herself proceeded there, not unwilling to escape for a few minutes from the glare and buzz of the ball-room. This conservatory was one of the great boasts of Allerdale ; three hundred feet in length, and of a corresponding height and breadth, it was paved with marble, and stocked not only with the plants but with the glowing shrubs and trees almost of every clime.

There the rhododendron, rising almost to the height which it attains on the mountains of India, swept the glass roof with its huge purple blossoms and dark shining foliage ; while on either side flourished, in equal size and vigour, the oleander, gorgeous with its scarlet flowers, or the myrtle, sprinkled thickly with delicate star-like blossoms, pale yellow or purest white. The conservatory, indeed, somewhat realized in its rainbow display of colours, that which we hear from travellers of the sumptuous vegetation of South America, from which country, indeed, had been brought many of the splendid specimens of Flora's bounty which enriched it. The pillars even that supported the roof were hidden by the clustering flowers of the most beautiful creeping plants ; while whole thickets of geranium contrasted with the modest grey hue of the sweet heliotrope ; and the arbours of roses were worthy of the gardens of the palace in which Beauty was received by the enchanted Prince.

In the centre of the conservatory was a magnificent fountain, Aphrodite rising from the sea, and the mermaids and tritons around her, pouring water from their shells ; while on those waters, as they fell into the large marble basin below, floated some fine specimens of the real Indian lotus, in all its varieties of colour—blue, red, and white. These

beauties of Flora's world were discovered, not only by lamps placed artfully amid the foliage, but by other lamps held in the hands of marble statues, and surrounded by shades of rose-coloured glass, which softened the glare, and tinged the white marble and the masses of shining foliage with the delicate hues of sunset. For the painfully pre-occupied mind of Ellinor, however, the conservatory had lost its charms, and intent only on seeking her uncle, she glanced hastily round till she reached the fountain, opposite to which was the great door leading, by the flight of steps before mentioned, into the park. Leaning on the edge of the basin was Richard Musgrave, but in an attitude so fixed and rigid that Ellinor instantaneously quickened her steps in the fear that he was ill; on a nearer approach she perceived that his straining eyes were riveted on the doors leading into the park, and naturally glancing in the same direction she became an immediate partaker in the apparent terror of her uncle. For there, horribly distinct in the strong glare of the lamp that overhung the doorway, was a ghastly human visage, glued as it were to the glass. The features, which bore the cadaverous paleness of the grave, were rendered yet more livid by the contrast with the dark unshaven beard and the matted elf-locks that hung over the brow. The eyes were apparently fixed on Richard Musgrave, and in their wild frenzied glare seemed to realize the fable of the basilisk, while the pearly glitter of a set of beautiful teeth between the thin purple lips did but increase the horror of the aspect. Surprise and fear at so strange a sight arrested Ellinor's steps, and while she remained rooted to the spot where she stood, the ghastly stranger pushed open the door and entered the conservatory. A faint cry then burst from the lips of Richard Musgrave, but the stranger, extending a

hand, long and lean almost as that of a skeleton, grasped that of Ellinor's uncle, but with a timid doubtful air, as though he feared some infection in the touch ; but then an expression of insane joy crossed his haggard features, and he exclaimed, in hollow but exulting accents, " Ah ! there is no cheat of fancy here ; though cold, cold and trembling, this is a hand of living flesh and blood, and you, you are Richard Musgrave. Oh, we have been parted too long, and you in this interim have been living surrounded with the world's luxuries and the world's respects, while I, no worse a man I think than you, sir, have been chained upon a couch of straw, imprisoned, beaten, and starved !"

" I knew not this, I knew not this," cried Mr. Musgrave, in a doleful voice ; " so help me Heaven, I knew it not ; I have given gold for you, and I thought you were living in as much comfort as, with the memory of the past, you could expect to know !"

" Comfort !" cried the stranger, bitterly. " Oh ! what comfort I have lived in you may learn by these rags which cover, but do not shelter me from the cold, these worn features, these skeleton hands—but we shall be interrupted here, come with me, come into the park. I have no time to lose in this neighbourhood, and I swear I will not fall alive into the hands of those who have wreaked their cruelty on me so long. But come with me, come ; there are things which you shall hear before our parting, and which you ought to have known long since."

With a pale countenance and trembling limbs Musgrave rose from his seat and tottered after the stranger, who with an imperious gesture waved him forward.

As for Ellinor, she had been unnoticed as she stood listening to this strange conversation, in a kind of stupefaction

of terror and surprise ; she strove to speak, to call her uncle back, but a choking sensation rose to her throat, and her feet seemed nailed to the ground. It was only when her uncle and the stranger had disappeared that the spell which had bound her was removed, and with a wild scream she rushed after them.

The night was clear moonlight, and as Ellinor descended the stately flight of marble steps she beheld her uncle bare-headed and with hasty steps following the stranger towards a kind of thicket or shrubbery that faced the conservatory. A horrible impression that her beloved uncle had placed himself in the power of an escaped maniac, for such she deemed the stranger, filled the mind of Ellinor, and uttering wild cries she fled after them, imploring her uncle to return. As if, however, he had partaken in the malady of the person by whom he had been so strangely summoned, Richard Musgrave disregarded her entreaties, and finally disappeared among the shrubberies, at the moment when the foot of Ellinor encountering the roots of a large beech, she fell prostrate and senseless on the ground. When Ellinor recovered her senses she found herself again in the conservatory, and supported in the arms of Aubrey Conyers, who was laving her brow with water from the fountain. Her first thought and first inquiry were for her uncle, and she then learned from Aubrey that her shrieks had been heard by some of the company entering the conservatory ; and that Lord Allerdale and his sons, with the principal gentlemen present, had gone in pursuit of Mr. Musgrave. Aubrey had scarce finished this explanation when Colonel Colman hurriedly entered the conservatory, with the assurance that Mr. Musgrave was safe, and returning to the house with Lord Allerdale. The ladies, too, whose curiosity had got the

better of their humanity, and who had left Ellinor to the sole care of Lieutenant Conyers while they crowded the steps of the conservatory to see what was passing in the park, now surrounded her with offers of assistance that was no longer needed. With that sensitive modesty, however, which is the peculiar characteristic of the first class of women, Ellinor had already disengaged herself from the arms of the young officer ; but when Colonel Colman advanced, and somewhat superciliously would have put the subaltern aside to offer his arm for the lady's support, Ellinor, in the integrity of her heart, felt she might, without compromising herself, refuse to reward with an insult the attentions of Aubrey, and courteously bowing to the Colonel, she said, " Mr. Conyers will, I have no doubt, lend me the assistance of his arm to reach the drawing-room ; I assure you, Colonel Colman, that though we have known him so short a time, circumstances have led both my uncle and myself to regard him as quite an old friend ; he always comes in like a knight-errant to our rescue."

" Mr. Conyers is fortunate, madam, in obtaining opportunities to serve you," replied the Colonel. " I am almost inclined to envy him." This speech was pronounced by Colonel Colman with the sweetest of smiles, and in the blindest of accents ; but Aubrey Conyers, who knew the man, no less from the ill reports of others than from his own observation, was well aware that in resentment for the courtesies of Ellinor, his commanding officer was laying up for him a heavy account of future insult and wrong.


CHAPTER XIII.

“Stars, hide your fires—
Let not light see my black and deep desires,
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.”

MACBETH.

THE bitter winds of the winter night careered wildly over the heath, and round the solitary inn where Aubrey had first met Edmund Conyers. The character of the landlord, Harris, and his wife, was, in spite of what the young woman, Magdalen, had said in excuse of their conduct, something more than questionable ; yet they had retained possession of the inn for many years, and though the few travellers who passed through that solitary district certainly could not have furnished them with the means of support, yet, if they ever knew want, it was occasioned solely by the reckless extravagance with which they would at times live, for at stated intervals they were well supplied with money. It was near midnight, on that night of the ball at Allerdale Castle, that a man, well mounted and defended from the bitter cold by numerous wrappers and shawls, knocked at the door of the Wheat Sheaf.

The querulous voice of the woman, Harris, as on the occasion of Aubrey's visit, was presently heard from the upper window, demanding the business of the applicant; she was answered in a tone no less petulant than her own, and with an inquiry whether her husband was at home. “Oh, mercy, Mr. Goodwin ; is it you, sir ?” returned the female, in



an accent of fawning servility. "I'll be down in a moment, sir."

On entering the house, the door of which was opened for him with all possible expedition, the traveller reiterated his inquiry, as to whether the man Harris was at home.

"Indeed, sir, he is not," replied the woman ; "I am main sorry, but he has gone down to the shaft, sir ; he will be in soon, sir, I dare say ; but indeed he has had a deal of trouble with them two wretches of late. Ah, sir, I does not say but what you is very generous ; but indeed it is a hard life, living in this bleak, lonesome place, looking after a pair of villains that is worse than mad people."

While the woman spoke she was breaking up a huge lump of coal which had been left smouldering in the grate, and which immediately spread both heat and light through the room. The traveller, meanwhile, taking off his hat and the shawl which had muffled him to the lips, drew near the fire to warm his chilled hands in the blaze, which then discovered the astute features of Mr. Nicholas Benedict, who had, doubtless, very strong, if not very good reasons, for assuming an *alias* with the man Harris and his family.

"Well, Mrs. Harris," said the lawyer, in that cold, sneering voice, which seemed common to him on all occasions, "the troubles which your husband finds so heavy are lessened by the half. Salton has escaped."

"The Lord have mercy on us, Mr. Goodwin ; you don't mean that," ejaculated the woman, in an accent of terror, and, dropping the heavy poker which she still held, she staggered back to a seat, pale and trembling.

"The fact is as I have told you," replied the lawyer ; "I am not in the habit of jesting, nor should I, even if I were inclined to be merry, choose such a subject for a joke."

"But, sir, sir, Mr. Goodwin," gasped the woman; "that Salton is such a villain, such a vicious wretch, and he knows so much, sir. Oh, mercy, he might hang us."

"Certainly he might," returned the lawyer, with his horrible coolness.

"But, sir, sir, what is to be done?" cried the woman, wringing her hands.

"What should have been done," returned the lawyer, "was to have kept a better watch over a prisoner whose escape could expose your husband to such peril. What is to be done, is, if possible, to entrap him again, and prevent the possibility of another escape; I happen to have learned by a fortunate chance the neighbourhood in which he is likely to lurk."

"But, sir," said the woman, her sharp grey eyes lighting with a malice that seemed partially to subdue her fears—"it strikes me, though, if Salton were to get quite free, and stuff it down the throats of the lawyers that he is in his right senses, your honour's worship would not stand a better chance than Harris, for all that you are a rich man and he is a poor one."

"Certainly not, so far as you are acquainted with the matter, my good woman," replied Mr. Benedict; "but I must tell you there is this trifling difference between your husband's position and mine. I have illegally imprisoned Salton, it is true, but had it suited my purpose or pleasure, I could have legally hanged him, as he could do your husband; do you perceive now, that I and Mr. Harris do not exactly occupy the same ground?"

"Ah, he is a fool, a fool!" cried the woman, furiously. "He has let you, with your devilish cunning, get the whip-hand of him, every way; he is to run the chance of being hanged,

forsooth, and you, who put the temptation in the way which brings him to such a chance, you are to crow over him, and cry that you are safe ; you, too, who would have winked at his cutting Salton's throat."

"My good woman," cried Benedict, in those cold bitter accents that fell like ice drops on the hearts of his victims, "if these absurd ravings, this insolence towards me, would in any way benefit your husband, the injustice of them might be excused, but so far from being of any service to him, they are likely to increase his difficulties, since they may provoke me to abandon him to the mischances resulting from the escape of Salton."

"Ah, sir, forgive me," said the miserable woman, bursting into tears. "I hardly know what I say, and it is so very dreadful to think on what may happen to poor Harris."

She was still rocking herself in her chair and weeping, while Benedict stood in moody silence by the fire, when another loud summons was heard at the house door. The new comer was Harris himself. "You here, sir !" he exclaimed, on seeing Benedict.

"Is that so surprising ?" responded the lawyer ; "is it not the time when you expected to see me ? I did not expect to find you away from home, but I hope your fatigue is not so great but that you can go with me to the hills."

"To the hills to-night, sir !" cried Harris, in a faltering voice ; "it is very late, and the cold is enough to freeze one."

"Come, come, my friend," said the lawyer, with a laugh which was much more unpleasant to the ear than any expression of anger could have been, "you are not used to fear dark nights or bitter winds, either for yourself or others : a lantern is your proof against the one, and a bottle of brandy secures you against the other. Speak out, Harris ; you are

afraid that I should discover that Salton has escaped ; your wife there will tell you that I was the first to give her that not very agreeable piece of intelligence. As luck will have it, however, and really luck often avails such rascals as you are more than you deserve, the mad villain has addressed himself to one who is so wholly in my power, that their correspondence will surely place Salton again in the toils, and I shall look to you, mark me, Harris, for his future security. It will be your office, understand, to make it certain that he shall not again escape. Certain, do you mind ; I am not disposed to be annoyed, because you cannot see to the security of a prisoner on whose safe keeping your own life depends. But enough of this, by to-morrow night Salton will be again in your custody, and now, if you please, we will proceed to the hills."

The man Harris made no reply to these remarks ; he cowered beneath the cold authoritative tones of Benedict, like a stricken hound ; his wife sat still with her face covered with her apron, and at intervals uttering low sobs.

"Do not distress yourself, Mrs. Harris," said Benedict, "Salton will not be able to make good his escape, and I assure you I shall not entertain any angry remembrance of the hard words you have addressed to me ; only allow me to advise you to be more cautious in your expressions for the future. It is not wise to use hard words to any person who has a knowledge of your offences, or to whom you owe money."

"What is that, wife ?" said Harris, with a terrified look. "I hope you have not used the liberty of your tongue with Mr. Goodwin ?"

"Yes," said the woman, "I did. I told him it was along of him that you were like to see a bad end, and it is so too.

“Oh, William, do not let him lead you into any more ill doings; he always manages to keep himself safe, and he is twisting the rope tighter for your neck every day. William, William, be advised by me; have done with him; go to the first magistrate, and own to the worst of your deeds; he, this fine Mr. Goodwin, had his share in that; no punishment they can give you can be worse than the life we lead. Hanging itself would not be worse than to have Mr. Goodwin always threatening us that we shall be hanged.”

The woman spoke these words with a passionate vehemence that would not admit of the interruptions that her husband attempted to make; and when she ceased speaking, she again covered her face with her hands, and gave way to a fit of hysterical sobbing.

“Wife! wife!” said Harris, approaching her with a terrified air, “you don’t know what you say; this good gentleman, Mr. Goodwin, you mistake him; he would not, I am sure, do anything to harm us—to harm us who have served him so faithfully.”

“Ah, too faithfully, too faithfully!” said the woman, sobbing. “Oh, William, what have we gained by serving him?—this lone, frightful house, instead of our pretty cottage; and the gallows in the distance, instead of a peaceful old age; and to see our children, our poor boys, growing up to be food for the gallows, too! Oh, William, say what you will, I shall call it an accursed day when you first met Mr. Goodwin.”

There was nothing more horrible about the Mephistophiles Benedict, than the seeming impossibility of rousing him to anger: the fiend is never irritated, he always laughs.

The hard expressions, then, used by Mrs. Harris, were heard by the lawyer with a smile; while the man Harris, with an

expression of abject terror in his face, began to offer excuses for the bitterness of his wife's tongue.

"Do not disturb yourself, Harris, I beg," said the lawyer in reply. "I am too old in the ways of the world to be thwarted or made angry by abusive language, either from woman, or from man. I want you to go with me directly to the hilla, therefore you will please to make ready, and leave your wife to vent her abuse upon the walls, or if she really thinks that I have been the sole source of your misfortunes, she has but to take advantage of your absence, and address herself to the nearest magistrate, telling him all the little circumstances connected with our first meeting, and the country at large will then take so decided an interest in your affairs, that I certainly should never have the liberty of meddling with them again, whatever my inclination might be."

To these taunts, pronounced with that concentration of malice for which Mr. Benedict was so distinguished even in this very malicious world, the man ventured not any reply, while the woman wept in silence. In a few minutes Harris pronounced himself ready to accompany the lawyer; he had, before this, provided himself with a small basket, in which he had placed some provisions, a bottle of brandy, and a rope ladder, with a strong grapnel at the end of it. With a downcast and sorrowful air, he then stood ready to do the lawyer's bidding; but as the latter, having resumed his warm wraps, preceded him from the house, he turned towards his wife, and said in a low tone, "Thee art main foolish, Susan, to go for to provoke this man; but let us hope we shall get out of his clutches some day, for Satan himself couldn't be harder to deal with."

"Will thee take thy horse, sir, for part of the way?" in-

quired Harris of the lawyer, when they stood outside the house.

"No!" answered the lawyer; "it is both troublesome and dangerous to tether him to the old oak, as we are obliged to do; some evil and strange chance might bring a wayfarer to the spot."

The night, though bitterly cold, was bright moonlight, and seemed to make unnecessary the lanthorn with which Harris was provided.

"Go first," said Benedict, and thus bidden, the man led the way towards the hill which rose at the back of the inn. A dark archway, half hidden by a clump of holly, yawned in the side of this hill, and pausing there, Harris held high the lanthorn to light Mr. Benedict through the entrance of what proved to be a natural passage under the hill. That passage was dismal enough, the ground shelving downwards at every step, and the rocky sides dripping with vapours that betokened the vicinity of some water-course, and broken with awful and fantastic forms, made more hideous by the faint and glimmering ray of the candle which burned within the lanthorn. And the two solitary figures, with the white feeble gleam hovering like the fabled corpse-light around them, and the deep profound of the darkness seeming to increase at each step they took, it would have required no very active imagination to have transformed the lawyer into the fiend, whose aspect might have been like his own, and the haggard, miserable man, who was his companion, into some victim whom he was driving before him to the bottomless pit. Vile, noxious reptiles, too, toads and lizards, drew their loathsome forms over the slippery flooring, and the damp air was tainted with a smell like that of the charnel. This dampness was occasioned by a sluggish pool which slept

blackly in a recess of the rocks. At length the dreary way was passed, and the man Harris uttered a gasping sound of satisfaction, as he stepped once more into the silvery flood of the moonlight, and inhaled the fresh, though piercing air. Never could there have been a lovelier contrast than existed between that dismal cavern of the rocks and the mountain defile through which Mr. Benedict and Harris were now passing. High above them, on either hand, rose the steep hills, broken into a myriad of wild forms, sometimes with their bare brown summits breasting the hollow gale, or sleeping darkly against the silvered azure of the midnight sky, but oftener crowned by the gently waving pines, not tall, indeed, as those "hewn on Norwegian hills," but yet gracefully decorating the hoary mountain's brow. A vegetation, too, luxuriant though hardy, almost covered the declivities of these hills; the birch, with its silver stems, and twigs of loveliest puce colour, huge clumps of holly, with its dark, glittering leaves, and yet brighter berries, and the mountain ash, very beautiful, but paler, both in fruit and foliage. At intervals, like a shower of diamonds, amid those dark woods, flashed the cascade, leaping in frolic as it seemed out into the moonlight, and then, more subdued in its mirth, murmuring gently along the glade, a streamlet so clear that the hue of the pebbles might be traced beneath its waters, while its banks were fringed with the soft, green turf, which is the peculiar boast and beauty of the "islands of the west."

Small note, however, did either the hard man of law, or his companion, make of the natural beauties that surrounded them. Seared, and guilty, and corrupted hearts,—ah, the miserable reptiles that drew their loathsome forms along the mountain cave were not more hideous than would have been

those hearts laid bare ; not more abhorrent, not a viler blur upon a scene of beauty and of peace.

Soon the scene changed, the charm of the vegetation disappeared, or at intervals only graced, like an oasis in the desert, some huge and frowning precipice. And those precipices grew more tremendous, heaped in wild chaotic masses, with deep rifts yawning dark and threatening at their side ; or huge disjointed masses of rock were jumbled together in a wild confusion. Not a shrub or a blade of grass was to be seen ; nought save here and there a dwarf pine or stunted oak, which had fastened its strong roots in some cleft of the rocks, and stretched its grisly arms over the gulf that gaped below. The pathway, too, formed only of loose stones, some of them sharp, or of large size, increased the toil of the travellers with every step ; while still the chasms grew so wide and black, the mountains so threatening and bare, that the scene assumed almost a volcanic aspect. In fact, Mr. Benedict and Harris were now traversing a district once celebrated for its mines, which had long since been abandoned. Just in proportion as the scene through which Benedict and his companion had lately passed was romantic and lovely, was that in which they were now moving, gloomy and horrible. Black, chaotic masses of rock, yawning rifts, steep precipices, and sullen streams, where the waters slept sluggishly and dark, expressed the very empire of desolation. There was a dull and at the same time majestic horror in the scene, which would have moved any hearts less preoccupied or less wicked than those of Benedict and his companion. But the former only looked upon the surrounding horrors as the fit accompaniments to the drama which he had enacted among them, and blessed, with the blessing which, like that of the hag, Morad, in the fearful story of Kelaun and Guzzerat, was a *curse*, the voiceless, horrid soli-

tude, and the deep caverns, and the towering rocks, which, hiding his crimes from the weak and undiscerning eye of man, he perhaps fondly thought would conceal them from the scrutiny of Heaven, from that judgment, that discovery to frail mortals of his guilt, which in his godless bravado he feared more than a supernal justice. But if thoughts exulting in their own blackness filled the soul of Nicholas Benedict, those of his companion were not less fearful, and hate of the lawyer, of the man who stood alone with him, and almost as it seemed at his mercy, in those wild solitudes, deep deadly murderous hate occupied the mind of Harris. The two were now treading the brink of a horrible precipice; they were obliged to proceed singly, for the narrow footpath did not afford room for two, and above them the grey jagged rocks soared almost to the sky, and below the precipice sunk sheer down hundreds of feet, and one false step, one slip of the foot on that narrow pathway, would have precipitated them a shapeless mass upon the hard stones below. Black, murderous thoughts, then, were festering in the heart of the man Harris: the brutal Benedict had strained the rein too tight, and the galled slave sought to break it. They stood, those two, upon that narrow ledge of rock, when suddenly, to the surprise, and despite the firmness of his nerves, to the horror of Benedict, Harris turned fiercely round, and barring the lawyer's further progress, he cried in an accent as fierce as his looks, "Mr. Goodwin, my wife was right; I have made a tool of me, sir; ay, a tool; a villanous advantage have you taken of your knowledge of my one false step, oh, Heaven knows, was most excusable; and you, you, sir, being, like a devil as you are, of that knowledge, have led me step by step into a maze of crime, in compare with the fault which placed me in your power was inno-

cence. But yet, sir, you should have a little mercy, a little compassion for those whom you make your tools ; there is a certain amount of suffering which human patience cannot bear, and you have tasked mine too severely. To be hanged, sir, as my wife said, can scarce be worse than the constant terror of such a fate ; and I would ask you, sir, what is to prevent me now, this very moment, dashing you from the precipice on which we stand ; you who for years have made me the partner of your guilt, yet left me not a moment in peace to enjoy the fruits of that partnership. I hate you, Mr. Goodwin, I hate you ; and now tell me, if I were to strike you from this rock, in what would my situation be made worse ? the gallows could but be my portion, if the guilt of your blood were imposed upon me, and the gallows must sooner or later be my lot, according to your account. Tell me, then, why I should not at least enjoy the sweets of revenge before I die, for revenge is sweet, and I may as well be hanged for two as one !”

With a heart of flint Nicholas Benedict had nerves of steel, yet an unwonted sensation of fear passed over him when, like a tiger at bay, the wretched instrument of his crimes thus turned upon him in that lonely scene and hour. For a moment even Benedict stood aghast ; it was but for a moment ; his superhuman audacity, his wicked confidence, did not altogether fail him ; *his hour had not yet come.*

It is said that the human eye steadily fixed upon the most savage of animals has a power to restrain its fury. What animal is more dangerous or savage than an infuriated man—a man exasperated, not only with a sense of wrong, but a sense of guilt ? yet it was but for a moment that the courage of Benedict failed ; he was a magnificent sample of iniquity ; his courage failed, then, only for a moment ; and fixing his keen grey eye upon his accomplice, he said, in tones that fell

slow and thrillingly on the night air, "I am sorry, Harris, that you are infected with the weakness of your wife. I shall be glad if you will tell me in what I have really wronged you? But as I have little time to spare, you will please to name forthwith your cause of offence, else I shall be compelled to send you to seek a new path among the rocks, a path you will never retread, and complete my journey alone." As Benedict spoke he faced his antagonist, and, drawing a pistol from his bosom, presented it at Harris. The latter had not been prepared for so bold a proceeding on the part of the lawyer, and his face, which had been flushed with passion, grew paler. "What, would you commit murder?" he cried, "would you shoot me?"

"Not unless the preservation of my own life demands the measure," answered Benedict. "I have an objection to blood spilling, as you know; and besides, you are useful to me; and if you will but avoid these useless bursts of insane passion, you may continue so, and shortly realize a sum which will enable you to quit England. You will please, however, at once to make your determination, for if, before I have counted six, you do not quietly resume your way to the shaft, I will send a bullet through your head with as little hesitation as though you were a hungry wolf."

Harris knew very well that Mr. Benedict was a man of his word, and cowering before the bold front of the lawyer, he faintly mumbled forth an entreaty that his honour would forgive him, for indeed he was half mad. Mr. Benedict knew that this last assertion was strictly true, for Harris was not the first person whom he had driven mad, and he had more than once admired the savage endurance with which the man had borne up against his tyrannies; he had broken others down with so much less. He was glad, then, when

Harris, facing about, resumed his scrambling course along the rough and dangerous pathway; for, independent of the fact that the man was very useful to him, he really entertained for him something of the same sort of admiration which the Romans of old might have felt for a brave gladiator in his death throes.

An abrupt angle of the rocks now terminated the doubtful path; the road grew wider, and descended into a valley, with the mountains towering on either hand. Along this road the pair silently pursued their way till they reached an old oak, which threw its bare gnarled arms half over a deep hollow in the rocks. The precipice was here so steep that to effect a descent seemed a matter equally frightful and impossible. There, however, Harris paused, and securing the lanthorn to his girdle, he slung the basket across his shoulder, after taking from it the rope ladder, which he secured with the grappling iron to the roots of the tree. The ladder just fell as far as a small shelf or landing place in the rock, and when Harris had descended, he waited there till he was followed by the lawyer, when, unhitching the grappling iron, he fastened it in a crevice of the rocks, and then, with his companion, descended to another landing-place. In this manner, by successive stages, as it were, the lawyer and Harris lowered themselves into the very bowels of the earth, till they stood in a gloomy cave, or rather gallery, from which branched off innumerable passages communicating with chambers or cells, which had never been penetrated by the light of day. In fact Mr. Benedict and Harris were traversing the dismal subterraneous recesses of a long-deserted mine. But now, as they proceeded along those horrible ways, where the feeble light of the lanthorn served to show rather than to dispel the darkness, their ears were assailed by sounds such as a morbid

fancy would conjure up for that baleful and eternal kingdom where hope is never known: wild shouts, hideous execrations, prolonged shrieks of mortal anguish, bitter sobs, and frenzied bursts of laughter. Harris paused as these dreadful sounds grew louder as they approached, and, shuddering, he said, "He is in one of his worst fits: shall we go near him, sir? you will learn nothing from him to-night; and when he is in this rage he gets worse if we speak to him. I have been often afraid that he would break his chain."

"Go on," replied the lawyer. "I have never seen him in what you call his fits. I am curious for the sight. It is something to ascertain how nearly a fine, accomplished man can be reduced to the level of a brute."

The coarse, uneducated Harris could not comprehend all the horrible refinement of malice which there was in this desire of the lawyer to behold an ancient enemy suffering under the most awful scourge of humanity; but from the very tones of Benedict's voice he so far understood that his desires had in them an unnatural cruelty, that he again shuddered with loathing no less than fear. They had now reached the place of the sufferer's confinement; this was a little chamber which had been inhabited at one time by the superintendent of the mine; the door, which was of iron, was heavily barred and bolted; it would have been impossible for the prisoner to release himself even if he could have broken the chain to which Harris had referred. The violence of his frenzy seemed to have past; his voice, as they neared the cell, had subsided to a low wail; and while they were removing the fastenings of the door, it ceased altogether.

"I dare say he has fainted," said Harris, as he pushed open the door. "He quite exhausts himself in these fits. I expect he will die in one of them."

"Not yet, I hope," said the lawyer; "we cannot spare him just at present, Harris. It will be quite too hard to have been at the trouble of maintaining and watching him for so many years, if he dies at the time when his living a little longer would be so useful to us. Bring the light forward, Harris; I cannot see where he lies."

In compliance with this injunction, Harris held up the lanthorn, the ray of which discovered the cell, which had apparently been fitted up with some care for the health of the miserable maniac. The floor was covered with felt, that prevented all damp; the pallet on which he lay was thick and soft; and the iron bedstead which supported it, and to which he was secured by a chain round the waist, was drawn so far from the walls on either side, that he could not injure himself by contact with them.

"Just as I thought," said Harris, holding the lanthorn over the pallet; "he has worn himself out, and fainted dead away. He will be quiet like now when he comes out of this fit, and we shall have no more raving for a week or two."

While the man Harris spoke, the lawyer stood intently regarding the wretched prisoner. He was apparently a man somewhat past the middle stage of life, for his elf-locks of hair were striped with grey, and his features, the outline of which was eminently handsome, were deeply furrowed; his wretched condition might, however, have prematurely produced these characteristics of age. The only garment of this poor wretch was a long robe of flannel, which, though loose, did not altogether conceal the still muscular proportions of his once fine form. He had fallen into a dead swoon, and a cold dew covered his livid brow.

"I hope he is not dead," said the lawyer, as he vainly felt for the pulse upon the clammy wrist.

"No, no, sir, don't be frightened ; there is a cordial here which I give him some of when he dies away in this manner."

The lawyer watched Harris eagerly, as the latter took a small bottle from a closet in the cell, and proceeded, by means of a spoon, to force a few drops of its contents down the throat of the patient. Not one gleam of pity, however, was there in the keen grey eye of Nicholas Benedict ; not even a moment of compunction softened the hard lines which his cruel nature had drawn about his mouth. His hope that the sufferer was not dead was based only in a selfish malignity ; he wished that miserable being to live, because to live was with him to suffer ; and the long years which had passed since the hour when that man, in the pride of youth, and wealth, and beauty, had given mortal offence to Benedict, had neither abated his rancour nor appeased his spirit of revenge.

"Thank Heaven, he lives !" said Benedict, as with a hollow groan the wretched sufferer opened a pair of eyes which seemed unnaturally large and black in contrast with his thin and livid face.

It is somewhat curious, and very horrible, to notice the thanksgiving of very bad people ; they blaspheme, with thanks for the success of their wickedness. Only those as fully conscious as were Benedict and Harris of the total prostration the poor prisoner's intellect, would have apprehended him to be insane when he first recovered from his swoon—there was so much of recollection in the steady look with which he looked around the apartment, so much of quiet, rational feeling in the subdued mournful light of his large black eyes. His first words, however, which he uttered, revealed the injured brain ; he mistook the lawyer for Salton, the man who had escaped from the cruel bondage in which he was

still held. This Salton had been almost as much changed by suffering as himself; the iron hand of wretchedness had pressed almost as hard upon him; but he had been ever a friend to his fellow prisoner. How then must the brain of the latter have been warped, when he mistook the well-clad person, and crafty, fox-like lineaments of Mr. Nicholas Benedict, for the tattered habiliments and grief-worn features of his friend!

"You have left me a long while, Salton," he said, endeavouring at the same time to take the hand of the lawyer in his; but the latter recoiled and drew hastily away, as if the poor shrunken member which the maniac extended would have scorched him.

"You have left me a long time, Salton, my friend," repeated the prisoner; "yes, my friend; how poor are the world's distinctions when real misery comes upon us! you, whom I once in the pride of life regarded as so much beneath me, an attendant while I was the master, are now the only friend I have. But I meant to tell you, Salton, only my brain fails, and I forget so sadly—I was telling you I have had some strange dreams since I saw you last, dreams in which I have suffered much, but which had a recompence for their misery at last, for oh, Salton, *she* came, and this I believe was no dream, she came and stood beside me—after my cruel tormentors had first plunged me in ice, and then driven me through raging flames—and she looked, Salton, as she looked in the days of old, when I bore her away in triumph from the self-denying, and the good, the generous, and the noble—from many lovers, alas, who were worthier of her heart than I was. But, mark me, Salton, she has told me now that she has forgiven all; that I have suffered much, and much has been forgiven. It was quite dark in this dismal chamber, Salton,



BENEDICT AND THE MANIAC IN THE MINE.

when she came, but her form dispelled that darkness; for a fair silvery radiance like that of the moon in her prime hovered around her, and made the spot luminous where she stood. And that radiance, Salton, was so sweet, it seemed to cool my heart and my poor burning brain. Yes, she stood just where you now stand, and her long dark brown hair fell down to her feet, with the white light glancing over it. She was very pale, too; it was the terrible draught which the fiend proposed for her, and which I gave her, which had changed her hue so much; for you know, Salton, her cheek was once like the bursting of the summer rose. But I shall never rave again, Salton; she came, that angel spirit, to pour balm upon my burning heart; and look you, Salton, she has told me that the triumph of the wicked does not last for ever, and that he, the base, low, cunning fiend, he who wrought all our misery, shall be caught in his own toils at last. I am happy in that conviction, Salton—happy!”

These words were all pronounced in a soft and plaintive tone, and a smile, which rendered less painful the sharp famine-struck features of the prisoner, played about his lips as he spoke.

But the maledictions which he had uttered in his frenzy, ere the lawyer entered the cell, were far less terrible to the soul of the latter, than the reminiscences which were awakened by the maniac's gentler hallucinations and low plaintive tones. The cold calm Benedict lost his self-possession, in the presence of the man who above all other created things he hated,—hated, though the object of his hate was a poor helpless maniac, chained within the impenetrable depths of a dreary mine.

“Mad fool!” he cried, between his clenched teeth, “I am not Salton. Look at me again! Mad as you are, do you not

remember the man upon whom you put the grossest of insults, and who has for years past, ay, even in this very hour, tastes the sweets of revenge ?”

The fierce tone and looks of the lawyer seemed for a moment to fix even the wavering fancies of the maniac ; he gazed earnestly at him, and then cowering upon his pallet, he exclaimed, “ Ah, I know you now ; you are the monster who has done all this ; but have a care—oh, have a care ; the consummation of your triumph is the beginning of your fall. That sweet pale spirit spoke with truth. I may sink, sink under your cruelties, but your ruin also is at hand, basest and most wicked of men—incarnation, rather, of ten thousand devils.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“He passed by the spot
Appointed for the deed an hour too soon.”

SHELLEY.

THE grey mists of the early winter evening were gathering thickly over the landscape, when Richard Musgrave issued from a small pavilion in the park at Ravenglas, in company with the stranger who had accosted him in the conservatory on the night of the ball at Allerdale. Three days had elapsed since then, which period had apparently been employed to the mending the condition of the stranger. Instead of the old-fashioned and tattered habiliments which he wore upon that occasion, he was now clad in a good suit of black; and though still miserably thin and haggard, his face had lost something of its famine-stricken look, for he had for the last three days enjoyed a sufficiency of wholesome food, with a due proportion of some of the best and oldest wine, from the well-stored cellars of Ravenglas. His appearance, however, was none the more prepossessing because he was better dressed and better fed; for his features had in them something of the fox-like expression of Mr. Benedict; there was a cunning in the twinkle of his small bead-like black eye, and a fawning servility in his manner and voice, that was even more unpleasant than the wildness and almost ferocity of his demeanour on his first encounter with Mr. Musgrave. The building from which he issued with the proprietor of Ravenglas was one which, placed at the verge of the park as commanding a magnificent prospect of the adjacent country, was never used in the

winter, and fitted with such accommodations that Musgrave and Ellinor sometimes passed the best part of the day there in the summer. In this pavilion the stranger had been concealed since the night of his visit to Allerdale, food and clothing having been conveyed there to him by old Thomson, the long tried and trusty attendant of the proprietor of Ravenglas. The old servant now followed his master and the stranger out of the pavilion, the door of which he locked behind him.

As the stranger now, in company with Mr. Musgrave, pursued the way through a narrow misty avenue of trees, towards one of the park gates, his exaggerated and almost fawning expressions of gratitude became painful to the honest and generous spirit of the latter; and somewhat impatiently interrupting them, he said, "Enough, enough, William, I have done no more for you than absolute justice demands. I knew not, as I told you when we met three nights since, to what a dreadful condition you had been reduced. I can only say that it was not my fault, and remind you of a fact which you can have scarce forgotten, that I am no less in the power of those at whose hands you have suffered so much than yourself, and that if *they* have inflicted on you the physical suffering of hunger and cold, me they have scourged with the far keener torments of the mind, with the threatened loss of name and fame, with disgrace which I could not outlive, for the taint of that disgrace would blight the fortunes of my innocent, my noble Ellinor. Oh William, that one rash fatal deed, in the guilt of which we both partook, though your share in it was indeed small in compare with mine, how long and how heavily have we been punished for it; how terrible a judgment may overtake us still, if I

keep not peace with those hard men, who govern me with the scourge of my own sin!"

"If your honour would take my advice," said the man called William, with a savage accent, "you might have revenge on them for what they have made you suffer."

"Yes, revenge upon them, ruin if you please to them, in which I myself should be included," answered Mr. Musgrave. "No, no, William, revenge would discover all that I have suffered to conceal, which I will die rather than ever acknowledge. And oh, William, if you really do feel grateful for the little I have done to assist you, let me implore you to keep yourself out of the way of those men; seek not revenge either for me or for yourself."

"If it is your honour's wish," replied William, with a sullen air; "but really for my part I don't understand this matter of forgiving people who have done us so much harm."

"William, William, let me entreat you to forbear, then, for your own sake," said Musgrave; "recollect that the law will not forgive what we have done."

"Well, well, your honour is perhaps right," answered William; "I will get out of the neighbourhood to-night."

"Do so, William, do so," cried Mr. Musgrave, eagerly. "Indeed we know not what measures may be taken by men so determined. You will be safe from them only in the vastness of London, and I will take care to secure to you the stipend for which we have agreed."

"Your honour is but too good. I will set off for London to-night," said the man, as he bade adieu to Mr. Musgrave at the park gate, which they had now reached, and of which old Thomson had the key.

That gate opened upon a kind of country lane, which was

a short cut to the village ; and with a mournful expression of countenance, Mr. Musgrave stood watching the man till he was lost to view amid the thickly gathering mists and shadows of the night. With a heavy doleful sigh, or rather moan, he turned towards the manor-house. On marking the despondent looks of his unhappy master, old Thomson then ventured to speak.

"Ah, master Richard, my dear master Richard," he said, using the phrase to which he had been accustomed when Musgrave was a boy, "it is quite true what William said ; you are indeed too good. The devil, they say, speaks truth sometimes, and so to-night has William, about whom I must say, that if he does escape the gallows it's more than he deserves."

"Thomson, Thomson, in your affection for me you speak too harshly," said Mr. Musgrave. "Remember how that unfortunate man was implicated in my fatal act ; remember that he has suffered for its concealment."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Thomson, doggedly, "I remember all that very well, and I remember, too, how the prying and tale-bearing of that very villain drove you almost mad, and was the principal, indeed I may say the sole cause of that very deed which was so terrible, and which has poisoned all your life. Pity William, indeed ! no, no, he has not yet had half that he deserves ; the sin you talk about was far more his than yours."

"Thomson, my good Thomson, spare me!" said Mr. Musgrave, in a broken voice ; "your excuses increase my sufferings. I have no consolation but in admitting the blackness, the horror of my guilt."

"Spare you ! Oh ! my poor master, if you would but spare yourself!" said the faithful servitor. And uttering no further

observation he followed Mr. Musgrave in silence to the house.

If the man William did not share in Thomson's severe estimate of himself, he at any rate did full justice in his meditations to the character of Mr. Musgrave; though the honesty, the generosity which he admitted, appeared to him only the height of folly. The sinister expression of his countenance strengthened after he parted from Mr. Musgrave, and as he walked briskly down the lane, he muttered in a tone of contempt, "Still the same as ever,—romantic, and cowardly, and stupidly generous. Bah! he does not deserve to be called a man, or he would have braved those villains long ago; the story for the world would be as bad for them as for him; they dare not tell it, for their lives. However, I am out of their fangs, and he is now completely in my power, these are two points gained; it shall go hard yet but I accomplish a third, and that is to have my revenge,—oh, but revenge is sweet."

In the bitter excitement of his feelings William had not only spoken aloud, but was wholly unconscious, as he strode hastily along, of a crashing among the thickets that bordered the lane; nor was he aware that any person was near, till a muffler was thrown over his head, and two muscular arms grasped him as in a vice. The horrible thought of treachery flashed in a moment across his mind; he knew well the persevering malice of the foes from whom he had just escaped, and with the energy of desperation he managed to tear the muffler from his face, and utter a loud cry for help. His assailants, of whom he now perceived there were two, still endeavoured to drag him through the gap in the hedge from which they had just issued, and he was engaged in a fearful struggle with them, when the hasty steps

of a third person were heard, and a stern voice demanded the meaning of so brutal an attack. One of the ruffians, then relinquishing his hold of William, aimed a furious blow at the new comer, which was, however, parried by a sword, which, passing through the wretch's arm, caused him to utter a loud yell of pain, and forthwith beat a retreat through the broken hedge. His companion, thus deserted, gave vent to a bitter execration, and followed his example ; William, who had received several severe blows in the encounter, was glad to accept the support of his preserver's arm, whom even in the uncertain light, he perceived to be a young man attired in the undress of a military officer.

CHAPTER XV.

"Not that I love Cæsar less, but that I love
Rome more."

SHAKESPEARE.

By the request of William, Aubrey Conyers, for he was the person who had so opportunely arrived to his rescue, accompanied him to the chief inn of the town of Allerdale, and partook with him of some wine, while a post-chaise was got ready to convey him to Carlisle. The escaped prisoner spoke of himself as a person of infirm health, and independent, though small property, and of course attributed to a mere desire of plunder the attack which he was well assured proceeded from motives far deeper and more malignant. By the light of the candles, too, at the inn, he closely scrutinized the features of Aubrey, and saying that he hoped their acquaintance would not soon close, inquired his name, stating that his own was Maitland, and that he would, with Aubrey's permission, so soon as he arrived in London, forward his address. Aubrey had, of course, no hesitation in giving his name, but he was somewhat surprised at the kind of start and uneasy look of Maitland when he heard it, no less than by the visible satisfaction evinced by the latter, when, in reply to an inquiry, couched in terms at which he could not be offended, he said, that he was not a member of the family of Lord Allerdale. By this time the chaise was ready for the stranger, who stated that urgent affairs requiring his presence in London, he could not

spare time for any endeavours to discover the villains who had attacked him.

Aubrey was not sorry to be rid of this stranger, for he had that afternoon been suddenly informed that he was to attend a detachment of the regiment to be stationed in the west of England ; this detachment was to start on the morrow, and at the time when Aubrey had come in so opportunely to the rescue of Maitland, he was on his way to Allerdale to bid adieu to Edmund Conyers, and to offer his thanks for the kindness which that young man had shown him. After paying his visit, it was his intention to proceed to Ravensglas, for indeed, Mr. Musgrave had sent him a letter particularly requesting to see him on that evening.

On reaching the castle, Aubrey was somewhat surprised to hear that Edmund Conyers had that morning set out for London. Though the courtesy of Lord Allerdale and his younger son had been stiff and repulsive enough, etiquette of course required that Aubrey should send in his name ; the dinner hour he knew was past, and he had been accustomed to make unceremonious visits to Edmund at a later hour of the evening. He was shown by a servant into an apartment contiguous to the dining-room, which it appeared that Lord Allerdale and his guests of the day had not yet left, as the sounds of high and cheerful voices met Aubrey's ears. He was annoyed at this circumstance, for he had hoped to find the family alone, and was little in spirits even briefly to join a gay company, though he certainly expected that Lord Allerdale would send him an invitation. He wonderfully miscalculated the amount of the peer's politeness ; the servant who had taken in his card presently returned, and with an insolence of bearing which Aubrey felt satisfied was

the result of the manner in which Lord Allerdale had received the announcement of his visit, said, "That his lordship desired his compliments, and was very sorry he could not have the pleasure of seeing Lieutenant Conyers, as he was engaged with some particular friends."

The proud blood burned upon the cheek of Aubrey at this unprovoked insult, which was the more galling, because consistently with his own dignity it was impossible to resent it. Writing P. P. C. on his card, he, however, gave it to the servant, desiring that it might be placed in Mr. Edmund's apartment; and the haughtiness of his manner so far cowed the insolent menial that he promised with sufficient civility to do as requested. Aubrey was then moving towards the door, but his mortification of the evening had not yet terminated; he had not reached the door when that of the dining-room was thrown open, and Francis Conyers, in company with Colonel Colman, Mr. Benedict, and one of the bluff squires of the neighbourhood, sallied forth. These gentlemen so directly encountered Aubrey that it was impossible to avoid saluting them; Francis Conyers gave him an insolent stare, and bent his head about half an inch from the perpendicular; Colonel Colman nodded and slightly laughed as he passed on arm-in-arm with Francis, and the lawyer also stared, but without even bending his head. The old squire, Mr. Featherstonehaugh, who had been one of the company at the hall, was in his simplicity fairly mystified by this rude reception of the young officer, who had been upon that occasion apparently one of the most honoured guests of the evening, and, determined in his honest pride and frank good-nature to let Mr. Francis and his companions see that their rudeness was not to restrain his civility, he seized Aubrey by the hand, and heartily shaking it, begged, in a tone loud

enough to be heard in the dining-room by the magnate Lord Allerdale himself, that before he left the neighbourhood Lieutenant Conyers would favour him with a visit. Aubrey perceived, and fully appreciated the motive which prompted this civility of the good squire ; such a simple act of kindness is worth much at a moment when we smart under an insult ; and Aubrey, heartily thanking Mr. Featherstonehaugh, expressed an unfeigned regret that he could not, in consequence of his military duties, avail himself of the proffered hospitality.

"Sorry for it, sorry for it !" said Mr. Featherstonehaugh, while Francis and his parasites, very ill-pleased at the squire's indirect rebuke of their rudeness, began to talk very loud as they quitted the room. "So you are ordered off, are you, my boy ?" said the squire ; "so much the worse, so much the worse ;—it is not often that rough old fellows such as I am can make themselves happy with young soldiers ; they are such a set of confounded puppies in general, like your officer-commandant, for instance. Ah, Mr. Conyers, he is wise in his generation too, and if you wished to abide a little longer in our *north countrie*, you should have been less handsome, and less agreeable, and less good-humoured, and have carried your nose quite high in the air, as if you could not hold yourself enough above a parcel of poor rustics, and in short, have sickened us all, man, woman, and child, with fantastical notions borrowed from a French valet. After all, we must come back to Dogberry, Mr. Conyers, and own that 'comparisons are odorous.' I have no doubt that Colonel Colman finds them so, and that is the reason that you are to be banished from communion with us honest plain souls of the North, and endure a purgatory, for such I am sure it will be to you, among the smooth-tongued, lying, canting Puritans of

the West. But without jesting, my dear Mr. Conyers, I am sorry that you are compelled to leave us, and I do tell you candidly, that I believe that stupid and shallow fop, your colonel, has taken a pique against you, because you are too popular, and in fact—not to mince the matter—more of a gentleman than he is. But bear a heart, Lieutenant, these things will happen in this bad stupid world, and remember this, wherever you may be, and in whatever difficulties, old Anthony Featherstonehaugh, rustic as he may be, prides himself upon reading men's hearts in their faces, and he has that opinion of yours that the strait must be hard indeed in which you would not find him your fast friend."

Aubrey was overcome by this unexpected kindness, and his voice faltered as he endeavoured to speak his thanks.

"No more of that, my dear young friend," said Mr. Featherstonehaugh, as he again warmly shook hands with Aubrey. "Remember, the only way to show your confidence in my friendship is to test it; if ever you are in difficulty and fail to let me know, you will deserve all that can befall the man who mistrusts a plain and honest friend."

There are some generous and noble hearts in the world, hearts whose honest kindly emotions settle in spite of themselves upon each word of the lip, and sparkle in each glance of the eye. It is well that it is so, for if the world were all one tissue of falsehood and malice, we should sicken and grow sad indeed. It was for more than the proffer of his personal friendship that Aubrey Conyers in his heart thanked Mr. Featherstonehaugh that night; it was for upholding his faith in human nature. There was a pleasant love of a little mischief in the good old squire, too, despite of the warmth of his parting salutations to Aubrey, whom, to the surprise and almost horror of Lord Allerdale's servants,

he accompanied to the hall-door ; and this love of mischief he was wicked enough to exercise upon the pattern man, whose virtues he ought to have respected—and if he had been anything better than a brute of a north country squire he would have respected them, for there are not many gentlemen holding so distinguished a position above the level of this working-day world, who would have been at the trouble of even affecting so much of sympathy for inferior mortals as did Mr. Francis Conyers. Surely, even an affectation of kindness ought to go for something. Now Squire Featherstonehaugh was a regular squire of the old school ; an inveterate fox-hunter ; an inveterate lover, too, of claret and old port, and to crown all, an inveterate old-fashioned Tory, a Tory to the back bone, who, very dull and gross in his notions, never thought of giving the children a stone when they asked for bread, and plumed himself very much upon his tenants being well supplied with bacon and beer, though he was fain to own that very few of them could read or write, but when reproached with his resistance to the march of intellect he would insist with the utmost obstinacy that his tenants were the best educated people in the county, since his estate was in finer order than any of his neighbours, and all the cottages clean and comfortable, the men being excellent hands at every kind of field-work, and the women thoroughly understanding how to bake, brew, and wash.

Mr. Francis Conyers called himself a Tory too, but there was a refinement and ethereal sentiment about him that quite shamed the roughness of the old squire ; indeed, his sentiments were so very fine, that as his brother said, they did evoke some remembrance of "Joseph Surface." Mr. Featherstonehaugh, however, was not very well acquainted with the last-named gentleman, and he had been a little

smitten with the exquisite benevolence of the sentiments of Mr. Francis, which really put his own rough generosity to shame. Mr. Featherstonehaugh was, however, one of those matter-of-fact persons who positively expect gentlemen and politicians to act up to their professions; and he did not think that the rude behaviour of Francis towards Lieutenant Conyers was by any means consistent with his professed sympathy for small farmers and their men; "for," argued the squire, "Lieutenant Conyers is as much of a gentleman as Mr. Francis himself, and one who, I am certain, is not a whit too well off in the world; there is quite enough food for kindness in his case, and Francis, instead of being kind, was very rude; he ought to have at least as much sympathy for a gentleman as for a ploughman; and either he is rude to the lieutenant because he is a gentleman, and that shows a very bad heart indeed, or he does not care about the poor, of whom he talks so much, and is a hypocrite altogether. Ah, Mr. Francis, I shall recollect all this when you stand for the county."

Francis recollected the standing for the county too, and the great influence of the squire. When therefore the latter, after his parting with Aubrey, joined the young patrician and his companions, with a somewhat lowering brow, Mr. Francis was as amiable as Joseph talking to old Stanley. With the love of mischief, however, at which we have hinted as the squire's failing, he took a pleasure in the show of a surly humour, just in proportion as he found that it annoyed Mr. Francis; and indeed he played this card so well, that when they parted for the night, he left the young man seriously uneasy in the thought that he had lost the great influence of squire Featherstonehaugh at the coming election.

Thinking much less of the insult he had received, after the

moment of mortification was past, than did the honest squire, Aubrey Conyers, meanwhile, pursued his way to Ravensglas, with a heart that, truth to tell, grew heavier with each step, in the remembrance that this must be his last visit. On reaching the manor-house he was shown into the library, where he found Mr. Musgrave seated at a large table, with a folio peerage, and a number of old books and papers before him. The countenance of the old man was even more grave and sorrowful than usual, and there was a kind of perturbation in his mild blue eye as he rose to welcome Aubrey, in which even his niece appeared to partake, for Aubrey remarked her colour vary, as, resuming her seat, she fixed her eyes upon the volume of Ariosto, which he almost fancied was a mere excuse for not appearing necessitated to take part in the conversation between himself and her uncle.

"Mr. Conyers," commenced Richard Musgrave, in those earnest melodious tones which never failed to impress the hearts of his hearers, "I wish to have some conversation with you, on a subject which has for the last week or two occasioned me much pain and anxiety, and I must preface what I have to say with an entreaty that you will impute inquiries which in the outset may appear almost impertinent, only to the most earnest desire on my part to act impartially between yourself and other persons with whose interests I think it possible that yours may be in collision."

To this exordium, by which Aubrey was somewhat puzzled, he could only reply by the expression of his complete reliance on the honour and kind feelings of Mr. Musgrave. The latter remained then, for a moment, thoughtful and hesitating, but overcoming his apparent reluctance to broach the actual subject that occupied his mind, he said,

"I think, Mr. Conyers, I have heard you state that your family have been for more than one generation resident in France; may I be permitted again to ask a question which I once before, perhaps, too abruptly intruded, and inquire if you have any idea to what branch of the Conyers family you belong?"

It was now Aubrey's turn to colour, and appear slightly embarrassed, as he replied, "I have to solicit your pardon, Mr. Musgrave, for my reserve upon a subject to which I might well have alluded freely, in my intercourse with a gentleman of so noble and generous a turn of mind as yourself; but my silence was the effect of a pride which I could not overcome. I was unwilling to state the fact, that my family was remotely connected with that of the lords of Allerdale, lest the present peer and his sons should imagine I wished to intrude my poverty upon their wealth, or found a claim upon their patronage, on the score of a relationship of which I do not even know the exact degree, and which would only place me with regard to them in a position much more humiliating than that of a stranger."

"You know, then," said Mr. Musgrave, "that you do belong to the Allerdale family, but you do not know in what degree?"

"I lost my father, sir, as perhaps you may have heard me say, when I was quite a child," returned Aubrey; "but I still remember hearing him speak of the great pride of ancestry entertained by my grandfather, who died somewhat suddenly in France."

"Your father, then, was born in France?" said Mr. Musgrave.

"He was so, sir," answered Aubrey, "nor did he leave that country till after the death of my grandfather, an event

which was, I believe, like the death of my dear father himself, accelerated by straitened means and a harassed mind. So straitened, indeed, were his means, that I have heard from my mother, to whom my father had often mentioned the circumstance, that not long before his death, he adopted even the painful measure of making his distress known to some one of the principal members of the Allerdale family ; and the rudeness with which I have always understood that his appeal was repulsed, alone determined me never to expose myself to a like mortification. Were I a rich man I should be less chary of owning my connexion with the lords of Allerdale. If this kind of pride is a fault, it is one which I cannot overcome."

"I do not blame you for it, my young friend," said Richard Musgrave. "If it be an error, it is one which, under the same circumstances, I should myself have committed. But we must not allow this over-sensitive pride to govern us too much ; we have a duty towards ourselves and our immediate connexions which sometimes demands the sacrifice of this pride, and such I imagine yours to be ; it is your duty at once closely to investigate, if not openly to declare, your connexion with the family of Allerdale."

The marked manner of Mr. Musgrave, together with certain vague apprehensions first awakened by his own extraordinary resemblance to the portrait of the old Baron Sir Marmaduke, and more than all, perhaps, the unprovoked rudeness of Lord Allerdale and his second son, now roused in the mind of Aubrey an expectation that he was about to discover some strange mystery ; and he sat anxiously waiting to hear he knew not what, while Mr. Musgrave turned over the leaves of the huge folio peerage which lay before him ; and Ellinor, as if unable any longer to mask

her perturbation, hastily put down the book from which she had been affecting to read, and walking towards a window, drew back the curtain, and stood apparently gazing out into the moonlit park.

"In the reign of James II.," said Mr. Musgrave, partly reading from the peerage before him, and partly addressing Aubrey: "Walter, the tenth Baron of this ancient and noble family of Conyers of Allerdale, had issue three sons, Walter, Henry, and John. We have here detailed the illustrious marriages, and the names of the offspring of the first and third sons, Walter and John; but it is the fortunes of the second son, Henry, that we have to consider. This Henry, some old papers of my own state to have been so determined a Jacobite, that after a total rupture with his father and brothers on the score of political opinion, he quitted England with the king. You will observe, Mr. Conyers, that my own family and that of the lords of Allerdale have been in such frequent alliance, that the papers and records of the one often touch upon the history of the other. The peerage here states that Henry was slain in the famous and bloody battle of Malplaquet; and that he was, at least, terribly wounded in that battle, I have evidence in these family papers, detailing the history of an ancestor of my own, a fast friend both of Henry Conyers and King James, who saw Henry fall, but was unable after the battle to find his body among the slain. Henry Conyers, then, was supposed to have died without issue, and in the beginning of the reign of George III., the line of Walter, the eldest son of the tenth lord, having failed, the title and estates fell to the descendants of John, the third son of the tenth lord, and an eminent lawyer. This baron, who succeeded in the reign of George III., was the grandfather

of the present Lord Allerdale. Now, Mr. Conyers, you will perceive at once, that if you are really connected with the Allerdale stock, it must be as the descendant of Henry, the second son of the tenth baron, and that painful and ruinous as such a fact would be to the present Lord Allerdale, he is placed by it in the position of a man holding a title and estates to which he has no legal right."

"That we did belong to the Allerdale family, was always understood among us," replied Aubrey, "but it was a distinction on which we never dwelt, for the relations of my mother were people of good position, but without any claims to noble blood, and in fact our descent was a matter to which, from motives of delicacy even, we never alluded."

"Have you any documents which the law would hold for proofs of your descent, Mr. Conyers?" inquired Mr. Musgrave.

"Perhaps this seal might go for something!" replied Aubrey, producing one of ancient but beautiful workmanship, on which the arms of Conyers of Allerdale were duly engraven. "I have treasured that seal," he said, "rather as a memento of my father, to whom it belonged, than as a proof of our connexion with the lords of Allerdale. I believe, however, my mother has in her possession some papers which do refer to our descent, though I have never hitherto taken the trouble to examine them."

"It would be well, then, that you should do so at once," said Mr. Musgrave. "The study of genealogies having been with me a favourite one, a vague suspicion darted into my mind the moment that you mentioned the residence of your family in France; for, knowing the private history of Henry Conyers, I have always doubted whether he really fell at Malplaquet: he was a man of proud and sensitive feelings, very likely to

withdraw altogether from a world in which he esteemed himself ill-used, and just as likely, from the tenderness and romance of his disposition, to marry in that obscurity. I am bound also to observe that this seal would go at least to strengthen other proofs; and though my private conviction can avail you nothing, it is due to my own conscience to declare that I do believe you to be the descendant of Henry Conyers. In my opinion, too, your extraordinary resemblance to the portrait of Sir Marmaduke has had some weight, for you may have observed on coins and seals how the same cast of feature has prevailed for centuries in the royal family of France, even among branches so remotely connected as the houses of Valois and Bourbon: we have the Jewish cast of the Capet countenance alike in Francis the First, Henry the Fourth, and Louis Philippe. I trust, however, you will make allowance for my painful and peculiar position. I will own, Mr. Conyers, that I have even wrestled with my conviction that in you existed the real heir of Allerdale, and that the friend of my youth and mature age is but an usurper; but this conviction, strengthening with each day of our acquaintance, it would be a crime and a dishonour longer to resist."

There was so much emotion in Richard Musgrave's tone and looks as he uttered the last words, that Aubrey, remembering the peculiar relations said to exist between Ellinor Musgrave and Edmund Conyers, and the personal kindness of the latter towards himself, felt, in the generosity and romance of his nature, almost as though it would be an injustice if, as the descendant of a remote but elder ancestor, he should rob the affianced of Ellinor of that brilliant position which had been so long regarded as her birthright. Perhaps, so subtle and false a thing is the human heart, poor Aubrey was unconsciously, in the emotion of the moment, awarding to

Edmund Conyers, in the title and estates, some recompence for another loss which he was innately aware that he had inflicted on him.

Aubrey paused not to analyze his feelings, but eagerly pressing the hand of Mr. Musgrave in his own, he thanked him for the candour of his late explanations, while at the same time he added, "Nevertheless, Mr. Musgrave, I own that I feel my position to be about the most painful and delicate that can be well imagined. Let us consider it for a moment: I am poor even to distress, I have a dear mother in failing health, and a beautiful and beloved sister, suffering also from distress which it is not in my power materially to alleviate. On the other hand, Mr. Edmund Conyers, the man whom I must propose to rob of all that from his birth he has been taught to regard as his inheritance,—titles, station, wealth,—he, I say, has shown me nothing but kindness—how cruel is the return which I am called upon to make. I could almost wish that his conduct had resembled that of his father and brother, with regard to whom, indeed, I have not these feelings of compunction. But there is something even worse than all this in the background: you, Mr. Musgrave, and your amiable niece,—am I to be the means also of injuring you, and that at the instigation of your own free and generous spirit?"

"My dear young friend," replied Richard Musgrave, "believe that I appreciate your feelings as fully as you understand mine; let us both then proceed upon the same principle. I have done what I considered right, in making you aware of what I believed to be your true position, irrespective of my friendship and connexion with Lord Allerdale;—it is equally your duty to investigate and even assert your own claims

upon this peerage—you have no moral right to sacrifice your interests to those of others.”

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a servant, who announced the arrival at Ravenglas of Mr. Benedict, who wished immediately to speak with Mr. Musgrave. The pale countenance of the owner of Ravenglas grew even paler when he heard the lawyer's name, but his voice was quite firm as he desired the servant to show that unwelcome visitor into his own private apartment, where he said that he would himself presently attend him.

The servant, however, had hardly withdrawn, when Ellinor hurried forwards, and affectionately seizing her uncle by the hand, prayed permission to be present at his interview with Benedict.

“No, my child, it is not necessary,” said Richard Musgrave; “I shall not suffer this disagreeable man of the law to detain me long, or allow him to spoil the last evening in which we shall for some time enjoy the society of Mr. Conyers.”

Quitting the room with these words, Richard Musgrave left his niece and Aubrey to a silence that was somewhat embarrassing. The latter was the first to break it, and he could speak upon no subject but that which was at the moment uppermost in his thoughts.

“And you, Miss Musgrave,” he faltered, “if this supposition of your uncle be correct, in what an odious position am I placed in your eyes! Must it then be my lot to peril your position in the rank you are best fitted to adorn? or, still worse, to give pain to those who, being dear to you, would, by my will, be ever sacred with myself?”

A faint sigh, which she seemed unable altogether to repress,

rose to the lips of Ellinor as she replied, "Ah, Mr. Conyers, have you seen so little of me, or misjudged me so much, as to suppose that I place an undue value on the gewgaws of wealth and rank? My sojourn in the world is a very short one, but I have lived long enough to know that neither one nor the other can secure our happiness: poor Edmund, would that I could say the same for him; but, oh, I fear that he is too dependent on the hollow world."

"He is still happy though," said Aubrey, with a bitterness of accent which he was unable altogether to control. "He is still happy, happy at least, Miss Musgrave, in your tenderness, your compassion."

"He would be much happier, I believe," said Ellinor, "in the means of maintaining that round of fashionable folly in which he has indulged so long, and which, in his case, as in ten thousand more, has gone far towards spoiling a naturally generous mind and not unfeeling heart."

If there was a bitterness in the tones of Aubrey as he alluded to Edmund Conyers, there was no less in the reply of Ellinor Musgrave; perhaps both parties, and especially Ellinor, had somewhat transgressed the strict bounds of delicacy in the allusion to Edmund Conyers. But the irresistible impulse of an impassioned heart had extorted these imprudent, even ungenerous remarks from Aubrey, and Ellinor, noble-minded as she was, and "chaste as the icicle," had not enjoyed the advantage, if such it be, of those lessons of duplicity which make, too often, the major part of a woman's moral education, and she spoke as she thought of Edmund Conyers. Her heart, however, was too much upon her lips; that vague apprehension on the mind of Aubrey as to her indifference to Edmund, strengthened into a conviction, and bewildered even his sense of honour, when to her, the

affianced of another, he poured out a passionate declaration of love. That declaration, at such a moment, only increased the unhappiness of Ellinor, for it stripped the veil from before her eyes, it made her aware how, while her faith was plighted to Edmund Conyers, she had given her heart, her soul to another. And what turpitude in that hour there seemed in her conduct, what shame, of what a worldly, self-seeking spirit would the world accuse her! for Ellinor, like her uncle, most devoutly believed that Aubrey Conyers was the true heir of Allerdale, and should she—could she, break her faith with Edmund Conyers now, should she refuse to plight her faith to him, when poor and abandoned to the world, whom she had accepted as the heir of a noble baron? Never were there two people less likely to realize the poet's dream of love than Ellinor Musgrave and Edmund Conyers; never did there exist a pair more calculated to convert into a reality that dear romance than Ellinor and Aubrey; but every sentiment of woman's delicacy, every impulse of a noble pride, forbade her, in the coming hour of his adversity, to reject Edmund Conyers to whom she was indifferent, in behalf of his rival whom she loved. Yet it is not easy for a woman, even of the noblest mind, the greatest energy of purpose, to reject from an abstract sentiment of honour the devotion of the man she loves. With bitter tears and broken tones, then, did Ellinor reply to Aubrey Conyers.

"I will not, Mr. Conyers," she said, "be the hypocrite to pretend that I have ever felt towards the heir of Lord Allerdale as women, perhaps vainly, hope to feel towards the man whom they are destined to marry, but ask me not to break my faith with Edmund Conyers now. Oh, you do not know under what circumstances I pledged it, or half the generosity of my dear uncle's revelations to yourself; thus much, however,

I may confide to your honour, for there can be no mystery between us now, and upon your solemn silence I can rely. Know, then, that my uncle, the last Musgrave of Ravenglas, is, by a series of unhappy circumstances which I cannot detail, a mere pensioner on his own estates, the creature of Lord Allerdale's bounty, who can at any time expel us at his pleasure even from this old abode of our ancestors. He willed, however, in his great generosity, that the nominal heiress of Ravenglas should be the bride of his son ; and now, when these estates of Ravenglas promise to be all the wealth of which Edmund will have to boast, ask yourself, Mr. Conyers, your own noble and generous heart, whether I can now break my faith ?—would you not yourself despise me if I could ?”

“But if Edmund would himself abandon the claims of which he so little esteems the value ?” murmured Aubrey. “Ah, Miss Musgrave, do not forbid me in such a case to hope, on the contingency also that your uncle's surmises are correct, for I dare not ask you to share my poverty.”

“You are not really poorer than myself,” said Ellinor, mournfully ; “but let us not speak of contingencies, for we cannot discuss them and preserve our own respect : we have, perhaps, met too late, since our destiny must rest with the decision of Edmund, for be assured, Mr. Conyers, I would never render myself unworthy of your love by sacrificing my claims to your esteem. Only this much let me own in justice to you, I have a hope that the time may yet come, when you might speak again as you have done to-night, without reproach either to my honour or your own.”

There was enough in these words of Ellinor to have satisfied a lover more exacting than Aubrey, but it seemed to him as though a ray of light had vanished when, as she ceased speak-

ing, she glided out of the apartment; and he was still so young and so romantic, that we doubt whether in his musings that night, as to the prospects which so unexpectedly had opened upon him, he did not regard those prospects more with a reference to Ellinor Musgrave, than in connexion with any other advantage. In respect to those prospects, however, it would be necessary to visit London, as such papers as had been left by the late Mr. Conyers were in the possession of his widow; for Aubrey, having never hitherto regarded those papers in any other light than as mementos of a deeply regretted parent, had left them in his mother's hands as safer than in his own keeping, whose residence, from the very nature of his profession, was never fixed. To apply to Colonel Colman for leave of absence, Aubrey knew would be useless; but as the major was the officer commandant in the town whither he was about to proceed, he trusted in the course of a week or two to obtain from him a permission to visit the capital.

In these meditations too, as to his own prospects, Aubrey did not forget the revelations which Ellinor had made with regard to her uncle, and which filled him with a very painful surprise, as Lord Allerdale was about the last person in whose power he would have wished any friend of his own to be.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Since I suppose we are made to be no stronger
Than faults may shake our frames, let me be bold ;
I do arrest your words : be that you are—
That is, a woman ; if you be more, you're none."

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

WHILE these strange and unexpected prospects were opening to Aubrey in the remote districts of Cumberland, his mother and sister in London were tasting a repose and comfort absolutely necessary to recruit their long harassed spirits. Their new friend, Mrs. Rushton, had, according to her promise, visited Mrs. Conyers the day after her introduction to Adela. Mrs. Conyers, with the kindest disposition, the most tender of hearts, had the least possible knowledge of the world which it was possible for a person of mature age to possess. The landlady, Mrs. Windsor, however, with a disposition equally kind, was endowed with all that shrewd apprehension in which poor Mrs. Conyers was wholly deficient ; and though little less charmed than her lodger with the sweetness of Mrs. Rushton's manners, she felt somewhat surprised that so young and beautiful a woman, so well supplied with money, should have taken up her abode at a common lodging-house in Piccadilly, unaccompanied by her husband, or any other ostensible protector. The very shrewdness, too, of Mrs. Windsor, made her more sensitively apprehensive for Adela than even her own mother could be, ignorant as she was of the world, and provoked for her the first harsh and unfriendly word that had ever with reference to her passed the lips of Mrs. Conyers,

who, when her landlady inquired whether "she was sure it was all right for Miss Adela to give these lessons to Mrs. Rushton?" sharply answered, "I should be glad to know, my dear Mrs. Windsor, how it can be wrong? Mrs. Rushton tells us frankly that her education has been neglected. I suppose she is some poor country girl, whose pretty face has obtained for her a rich husband; and I can tell you that for only two hours' attendance each day, she has offered Adela double the money which she gets for toiling with those horrid girls at Clapham for four. I should therefore be glad, or rather I may say sorry, to hear of any reason why she should refuse such an offer."

"Well, ma'am," answered Mrs. Windsor, "certainly in the general way there would be no more objection to Miss Adela giving lessons to a lady whose education has been neglected than to those rude bad disposed girls; still you know, my dear lady, that Miss Adela is very young, and very pretty, and London is a dreadful place, especially that west end of it; and for Miss Adela to go up there every day, with nobody to take care of her, and not knowing much after all of the lady she is going to teach, for I do believe that Mrs. Jackson you used to lodge with wouldn't care who she took into her house, so as they had got money—indeed, my dear Mrs. Conyers, I should be going downright against my conscience, if I said I thought it right for Miss Adela to go, or mix herself up, with people you know nothing about."

"And indeed, Mrs. Windsor," answered Mrs. Conyers, sharply, "I thought you had more sense, and, I will add, more good feeling, than to have talked as you are now doing. Who can be a better judge than myself of what is or is not proper for Adela to do? I think I am as good a judge of people's characters as you can be, and I found Mrs. Rushton very

amiable and ladylike. Her education has no doubt been neglected, but that is a defect which can be remedied with a person so gentle and submissive as she is."

"A deal too gentle and submissive, Mrs. Conyers," retorted the landlady. "Ah, you do not know the world as I do. God forgive me if I wrong her; but beautiful and rich as Mrs. Rushton is, she would find plenty of lady acquaintances, if she were a woman that ladies could visit."

"I am shocked at your want of charity, Mrs. Windsor," said Mrs. Conyers. "Have you forgotten quite, how Mrs. Rushton released us from the dreadful dilemma in which we were placed by that vile chemist?"

"Indeed, madam, you do me wrong. I never forget such things," answered the landlady; "and I assure you my worst suspicions are only that Mrs. Rushton may be herself deceived by some wicked rich man, in which case I should still believe that her good heart would recompense for a great deal, but that would make her none the more a fit companion for Miss Adela."

"You have said quite enough, Mrs. Windsor," said Mrs. Conyers, assuming a kind of majestic air, which was not uncommon with her, when she was suspicious of the wisdom of her own proceedings. "I had formed a better opinion both of your judgment and your heart. However, you will, I do not doubt, see your beautiful prognostications falsified, for Adela will commence her course of lessons with Mrs. Rushton to-morrow."

Mrs. Windsor's shrewdness did not fail her, even under these somewhat provoking circumstances; she feared that the position of Mrs. Rushton was not such as to justify her becoming the companion of Adela Conyers: "But after all," she said to her daughter, "you know, Charlotte, that what

can't be cured must be endured, and I shall venture to put Miss Adela on her guard, for she has more sense in her little finger than her poor dear mother has in her whole body."

This laudable intention of putting Adela on her guard was accordingly executed by Mrs. Windsor with a tact that would have done credit to a patroness of Almack's, and which to our humble opinion was exercised in a much better cause; for we do think it better to employ even a fastidious caution in the choice of companions for a young and beautiful woman, than to parade her in a ball-room as a prize for the highest bidder.

The advice, then, of Mrs. Windsor having been wholly rejected by her lodger, Adela became not only the instructress, but the most intimate acquaintance of Mrs. Rushton, in whom she every day discovered stronger evidence of a generous and impassioned heart, and a fine but uncultivated mind.

The lapse of another fortnight, too, brought Mr. Rushton himself to town; in him Adela discovered a person the very contrast of his wife: his person, though graceful, was effeminate; his manners had the most perfect polish of fashionable life; his mind was highly cultivated, and his heart, as far as Adela had the opportunity to judge, was very cold.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I have no tongue but one, gentle my lord,
I pray you speak the former language."

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

It was about a week after the departure of Aubrey Conyers from the neighbourhood of Allerdale, that the busy fingers of Charlotte Windsor were gracefully adjusting the simple white muslin dress which during the day she had been employed in making for Adela. "There," she said, as, after fastening to her satisfaction the knots of pale blue ribbon on the sleeves and bosom of the dress, she placed a wreath of artificial convolvulus on the silken tresses of Adela, "tell me now, dear Mrs. Conyers, does not Miss Adela look beautiful? and must she not expect that we shall scold her well, if she does not captivate some fine rich gentleman at this grand party?"

These words were addressed to Mrs. Conyers, who was lying in her bed, to which she had been confined for some days, contemplating her beautiful daughter with great complacency. Adela had been invited on that evening to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Rushton to a large party, given at his villa at Fulham, by the money-lender Silvertree, of the villainess of whose character it is but just to say that Mrs. Rushton was wholly ignorant. Poor Adela, too, who had been so long shut out from every scene of gaiety, looked forward to her visit with pleasure, and had been rather offended by the hints which she had received from Mrs. Windsor, of the doubts

entertained by the latter as to the substantial respectability of her new friends the Rushtons. In better spirits than she had known for some time did Adela take leave of her mother, and step into the vehicle which was to convey her to the residence of the Rushtons, who were to take her in their carriage to the residence of Mr. Silvertree. Adela fancied, on her arrival in Clarges-street, that the reception of her friend had lost something of its extreme frankness and cordiality, and that the gentle melancholy which uniformly distinguished her manners, had deepened into absolute gloom. Mrs. Rushton was superbly arrayed for the party, in a garb that admirably became the imposing and severe style of her beauty: a robe of royal blue velvet, profusely trimmed with the finest Brussels point, and a necklace, bracelets, and tiara of diamonds. Mrs. Rushton looked very pale, but never more beautiful than on that night, yet her husband pettishly found fault with her appearance, and Adela observed the tears rise in her beautiful eyes as she turned away from him. She needed nothing more to account for the gloomy aspect of her friend, for this was not the first time, during the short week of Adela's acquaintance with Mr. Rushton, that she had heard him address his wife in terms which led her sadly to apprehend that poor Mrs. Rushton, having been wedded for her beauty, was now, in spite of her sweet temper and loving heart, despised for her lack of mental acquirement; a deficiency which she always, when alone with Adela, exhibited even a painful anxiety to supply. During their ride to Fulham, Mr. Rushton indulged even to exuberance in his usual gay sallies, while his lady, wrapped in her mantle, shrank into a corner of the carriage and was wholly silent, save when the friendly and sensitive ear of Adela caught the utterance of a half suppressed sigh. On their arrival at the villa of Mr.

Silvertree, however, the novelty and splendour of the scene diverted even the thoughts of Adela from an anxious surmising as to the sorrows of her friend. The solid evidences of wealth, unostentatious even in the strong consciousness of its own importance, to which Adela had been accustomed in the house of General St. Leger, by no means prepared her for the sumptuous luxury, the glare, and display exhibited in the establishment of the money-lender. The villa was enclosed in its own grounds, which at the back sloped down even to the margin of the river; its exterior was by no means remarkable; all the splendour of wealth was lavished within.

A somewhat bold looking female, who passed for the wife of Mr. Silvertree, and whose attire was distinguished rather for its lavish expense than for taste, received Adela and Mrs. Rushton, and conducted them to the principal drawing-room, an elegant apartment, hung with rose-coloured satin fringed and embroidered with silver, the framing of the chairs and couches being of ivory inlaid with the same metal.

The company there assembled, somewhat to the surprise, and by no means to the satisfaction of Adela, consisted chiefly of gentlemen, who were for the most part so deeply engaged in play that they did not notice the entrance of Adela and her friend, while those who were lounging on the sofas and ottomans in converse with the few females present, eyed the two ladies with a boldness so offensive that Mrs. Rushton, drawing back, whispered a few words to her husband, who replied by hastily shaking her hand from his arm, and a sneer at her provincial ignorance of polite society, which, though also delivered in a whisper, had in it an asperity which pained the ear of Adela, and brought tears into the eyes of Mrs. Rushton.

Shrinking they scarce knew why from the company by

which they were surrounded, Adela and her friend withdrew to a sofa at the remote end of the room, a proceeding which was observed with an insolent giggle by the other females, who, however, did not offer to obtrude their company upon them. That either his wife or Adela should thus seclude themselves from the company to which he had been the main cause of their introduction, was no part of Mr. Rushton's plan, and presently approaching, with a tall, handsome, military looking man by his side, he said, "Come, ladies, you are withdrawing from our poor company in a very ungracious manner, like the sun behind a cloud; do vouchsafe to inferior mortals a little of the radiance of your smiles, especially to my friend here, Colonel Colman, who grounds his hope of a favourable reception from Miss Conyers, upon his professional intimacy with her gallant brother."


Adela was of course acquainted with the name of Aubrey's colonel, and she was quite unacquainted with the disagreeable points of his character, for the tender consideration which Aubrey always had for the troubles of his mother and sister had made him ever scrupulously guard against increasing them by a detail of his individual vexations. When therefore the colonel, in terms of even exaggerated courtesy, expressed his pleasure at this introduction to Miss Conyers, the innocent girl rejoiced in the idea that she had really encountered a friend, and observed not the equivocal smile that lighted up the handsome features of the colonel, or the certain tone of derision in his voice, as he said "that he had the more pleasure in this introduction to Miss Conyers, as this evening it was so entirely unexpected."

After some little conversation with Adela, however, the gallant officer devoted himself more particularly to Mrs. Rushton, but his presence had put Adela at her ease, as it

seemed to her inexperience a kind of guarantee for the respectability of the rest of the company ; and with something of her old artless gaiety she suffered Mr. Rushton to lead her to the piano, where she enchanted all present with the delicacy of her touch, and the full, rich melody of her incomparable voice. Mr. Rushton was an enthusiast in music ; luxurious as the Sybarite, he especially delighted in the science of sweet sounds, because they lulled him into that state of dreamy, idle languor which was the greatest enjoyment for his effeminate and selfish nature. Many and bitter were the tears with which his wife had regretted her ignorance of an art which she hoped might have arrested his wandering fancy ; vainly hoped, indeed, for he was as incapable of understanding as of returning such a love as hers, a love of which he was wholly unworthy.

Losing herself, as she always did in the exercise of the art to which she was most devoted, Adela observed not the increasing melancholy and restraint of Mrs. Rushton's manner, and as at the splendid supper-table she sat some seats below her friend, and on the right hand of the hostess, neither had she any opportunity of remarking how the former seemed to shrink more and more within herself as the gaiety of the party increased ; a gaiety in which Adela now in the innocence of her heart partook.

The long and luxurious repast was scarce concluded, when some one present proposed a dance, and those of the company who were favourable to the proposition were forthwith shown into an elegant ball-room, at the upper end of which, in a well-fitted orchestra, immediately assembled the band of professional musicians who it seemed were always engaged to be at Mr. Silvertree's parties in case their services should be required. As the number of ladies present on the evening



referred to was, as before observed, very small, the hand of Adela was eagerly sought, and she was engaged in the lively mazes of a quadrille when Mr. Rushton, hastily approaching her with a disturbed countenance, informed her that his wife had been so suddenly taken ill, that he had been obliged to conduct her to the carriage, which was waiting only for Adela. Heartily grieved at this announcement, Adela threw her shawl over her shoulders, and hastily took leave of Mrs. Silvertree. So eager was she in her anxiety to rejoin her suffering friend, that as Mr. Rushton handed her into the carriage, she did not notice that the lamps which had lighted them on their way to Fulham were now extinguished, or note the impetuous haste with which he sprang in after her, and closed the door of the vehicle, which was then driven from the villa with such railroad speed that it had already cleared the grounds, and was dashing along the road, ere Adela discovered that Mrs. Rushton did not occupy a place in it. No words could describe the astonishment and horror that seized upon the heart of the defenceless Adela; but the treachery, if treachery there was in the conduct of Mr. Rushton, was so fearful, so ominous of the worst destiny to herself, that she refused for a moment to credit her own fears, and in a gasping broken voice she exclaimed, "Sir, Mr. Rushton—what does this mean?—your lady is not here! what horrible mistake is this, is she worse than you ventured to tell me—is she dying—is she dead?"

"Calm yourself, I beseech you, dearest, loveliest Miss Conyers!" said Rushton, forcibly drawing her back to her seat, "your friend is well, and no harm is intended to you; Ah! does not your own heart tell you, sweet Adela, that you can have no harm to apprehend from me? have my eyes,

my voice, my general conduct towards you, spoken so ill for the passionate, the insane love I bear you ?”

“Mr. Rushton !” cried Adela, with a burst of indignant tears—“this language is the most barbarous of insults ; oh ! what has there been so unmaidenly, so unbecoming in my conduct, that the husband of my friend should dare address me thus ?”

“Adored Adela, pure as the snowdrop,” answered Rushton, “misjudge not yourself and me so much ; no, be assured that the husband of the young woman whom you know by the name of Rushton, would, indeed, never dare to insult your purity with the words of love ; and for myself, have I appeared to you so little of a gentleman, of a man of education or taste, that you suppose that I could elevate that poor weak young woman to the position of my wife ?”

“Wretch !” exclaimed Adela, with increased anger. “Be silent, for shame, if for no better motive—each word you utter serves but to show alike the weakness of your head, and the utter depravity of your heart. I know not in which way you most grossly exhibit your vileness, whether in boasting that the unhappy young woman is not your wife, and alleging as an excuse for your baseness towards her that deficiency of education which, doubtless, made her more easily your victim, or the audacity with which you own to having imposed her upon me, a woman of honour, the child and sister of honourable men, as your wife. Oh ! my dear brother Aubrey, would that you were here to protect me now !”

“By all that is sacred, Miss Conyers—” began Rushton, but she interrupted him with a bitter exclamation.

“Do you dare to mention aught that is sacred, you who

alike defy the laws of God and man, for even the corruption of modern morals pauses at the enormity of introducing to a female of spotless character, a creature so unfortunate as you intimate the unhappy Mrs. Rushton to be!"

"Adela, pardon me," pleaded Rushton, "I knew not my own vileness till it came in contact with your purity; I feel now, I now see my turpitude towards that miserable woman whom I have perhaps sacrificed to a transient fancy; but let me hope that my sin is not so great as your innocence imagines; born among the lowest class, wholly without the delicacy of your refinement, a provision which will secure her a comfortable support may make to Mrs. Rushton some amends for the injury I have inflicted on her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Adela, bitterly, "this, then, is the fashion of man's repentance for the greatest injury he can inflict on woman!—a provision which shall secure her a comfortable support: that a vile money compensation, is to make amends to a poor woman for the blighting of every pure and holy feeling. Oh, Mr. Rushton, if you can so little estimate the strength of that unhappy woman's attachment to you, you prove indeed to me how little, as a rule, man is ever worthy of woman's love. I know it, I feel it in my own heart, I could not bear such misconception in the man I loved, that he should suppose that a mass of dross, an amount of hateful pelf, should pay me for the loss of his love. I would die to show how much I scorned both him and the vile ore which he dared offer as a compensation for the heart's best affections. And mark me, sir, I do not love you, I hate and despise you, but that wretched woman loves you with a love which it is a crime, a sacrilege to trample down, and a crime which, if you repent not, shall yet be heavily visited upon you!"

"Adela, you do not know me," expostulated Rushton; "I am not what I seem: to have married that young woman would have been wholly to forfeit my station in society, and believe me, it is not money I regard, but birth, education, refinement, and nobility of mind like yours!"

"Will you permit me to ask, sir," said Adela, endeavouring to overcome her anger and fear, "what is your object in thus entrapping me from the society of my friend, of whose purity, permit me to say, I have no reason to doubt save upon your word, and you were introduced to me as united to her by the most sacred of all ties?"

"My object! oh, Adela, can you ask me that?" said Rushton. "Do you not see, dearest, that the painful situation in which I had imprudently placed myself with Mrs. Rushton, left me no opportunity to throw off the mask which has been odious to me, and declare the purer passion with which your beauty and talents have inspired me, save the rough abrupt measure of which I have made use? I was compelled to falsehood, I acknowledge. Mrs. Rushton is gone home, for I told her that, having learned the character of some of the company assembled at Mr. Silvertree's, you had withdrawn in high indignation at the deception which she herself had been the first means of practising upon you!"

The woman's heart of Adela swelled high at this audacious acknowledgment; but bridling her anger in the hope of escaping from a man whose language rendered him each moment an object of greater terror to her, she said, "I own, Mr. Rushton, that the contempt with which you speak of the woman you have deceived, by no means improves my opinion of yourself; but if you really wish me ever to think of you more favourably, to pardon the cruel deception you have practised, you will at once direct your coachman to

proceed to the nearest cab-stand, that I may return alone to the residence of my mother."

Rushton laughed scornfully at this proposal. "By no means, sweet Adela," he said; "I have more regard to your comfort and my own happiness, than to suffer so much beauty and grace as you possess to be again shrouded in the obscurity of so miserable a dwelling as that which I understand from Mrs. Rushton you have occupied with your mother."

"Then in Heaven's name, sir, what do you mean, or where are you about to convey me?" demanded Adela, in a voice faint with terror.

"What I mean, sweet Adela, is to make you my wife, a distinction which, I solemnly swear to you, I have never till this moment offered in sincerity to any woman living; as to the place whither I am conveying you, you will not, I think, have reason to complain of that—'tis to a very pretty villa at Wimbledon, which I shall take very good care you do not leave, till all the authorized forms of the law and the church have made you mine."

"And you really mean this?" gasped Adela.

"I do indeed," answered Rushton, and a faint ray of the moon breaking into the carriage at that moment showed his handsome features lighted with insolent exultation, the smile full of mockery that curled his lip, and the bold meaning of his full blue eyes, as their fiery glances poured down on the pale face of the girl, who trembled in his grasp like the bird in the net of the fowler.

Despite the fragility of her form, her timid, nervous susceptibility, Adela Conyers shared, to a certain degree, in the firm haughty spirit of her brother: she was wholly in the power of this man, Rushton, for whom she felt an equal

amount of loathing and contempt, and whose offers of marriage she would have scorned—even had she believed them sincere. She was, however, for the time, in his power, and it was necessary to dissemble ; so she suffered her left hand to remain in Rushton's clasp, and listened with seeming patience while he dilated upon the ardour and honourable intentions of his love for herself, and framed excuses for his own conduct towards the unhappy Mrs. Rushton. The carriage had now somewhat abated of a speed which would have been absolutely dangerous, had it been continued, and the anxious ear of Adela presently detected upon the frosty ground the measured beat of horses' hoofs, unaccompanied by the wheels of a carriage. Perhaps as the sound came nearer, Rushton felt the little hand which he still held in his tremble more violently, for he clasped it somewhat closer : the right hand of Adela, however, was still at liberty, and regardless of the wounds she received from the broken glass, she dashed her hand through it as she heard the riders approach, and uttered a loud cry for help.

A bitter oath broke from the lips of Rushton, and obedient to his commands the coachman endeavoured to drive on, but the foremost horseman, being well mounted, outstripped the speed of the carriage, and seizing the horses' heads, demanded the cause of the shrieks which Adela still continued to utter.

"'Tis nothing—nothing, sir!" cried Rushton from the carriage window, which he had now let down ; "a mad-woman only, whom we are conveying to a place of restraint ; be so good as to allow the coachman to drive on."

"I know that voice," muttered the rider to himself, "and too much of the speaker to suffer him to drive on without hearing what this poor woman, whom he terms mad, has to say for herself. Ah!" he continued, as in the dim light he

discovered the features of Rushton, who in his anger was leaning from the carriage window ; “ why, my most gallant and noble friend, how is it that I find you in charge of maniac ladies !”

“ Oh, but sir ! I am not mad—I am not mad !” exclaimed Adela. “ Oh, for pity’s sake, save me from this man, and restore me to my poor mother !”

“ I am really surprised, Mr. ——” began the new comer—but he was interrupted by Rushton, who said, with his usual scoffing tone—

“ Oh, be not surprised, I pray you, Neville, at any wild action in which you find *Harry Rushton* engaged : the young lady has really taken more offence at a little frolic than she need have done,—but if she prefers your guardianship to the arms of her mamma, I have no objection ; take charge of her, if you please, but observe, I expect that towards me you will act like a man of honour, and have a regard for mine !”

“ Do not fear me, sir !” said Mr. Neville, as he handed the half-fainting Adela from the carriage, “ I have never yet forfeited my own honour, or tampered with that of others.”

“ You have then probably never been tempted,” answered Rushton, “ so give heaven thanks, and make no boast of it !”

With these words he threw himself back in the carriage, bade the coachman drive on, and left Adela with her hand and arm bleeding profusely, and supported by her preserver in the middle of the road.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Present fears are less than horrible imaginings."

MACBETH.

THE red sunbeam of a raw November morning scarce pierced through the heavy fogs which hung over the park at Allerdale, and my lord had lights in the library, where, in company with Mr. Benedict, he was carefully examining a heap of old letters. Some of those letters were written in a delicate female hand, and even from Lord Allerdale, the hard dealing man of the world, broke so heavy a sigh as he examined them, that the lawyer looked up, and the wicked sneering smile grew stronger than ever on his lip, as he observed how the hand and lip of the peer trembled, as he turned over those worn and faded letters. The lawyer made some trifling remark, and the peer raised his head, and answered in a firm voice,—but his eyes were still so humid that the lawyer was confirmed in the suspicion that he had heard the plash of tears on those old letters.

"I think, my lord," said Benedict, "that if we can but again secure that villain Salton, we may say that the prize for which we have toiled so long is safe within our grasp."

"Ah, if—if!" returned Lord Allerdale, bitterly. "Oh, Benedict, is that one little hateful word for ever to stand between us and the reward for what we have suffered, and what we have done? Benedict, when I look over those letters they wring my heart, and I wonder how I could inflict such torture upon the being whom I loved so well ;

—but she has been avenged, well avenged from her cold grave upon us both—for has not the horror of discovery, the fear of its overwhelming shame, poisoned alike your profit and my revenge?”

“My reflections are not, certainly, at all times pleasant,” replied the lawyer, drily; “and I will own I would not have encountered them for any possible amount of revenge—profit is another thing; and your lordship must allow me to observe, that you have played a little for that too! Are not the estates of Ravenglas in that condition that you can at any time foreclose the mortgage? and will not the marriage of your son with Miss Ellinor secure them to you still, though Richard Musgrave were to discover every artifice which we have practised against him?”

“Ah! the marriage of my son—do not speak of that, Benedict,” said Lord Allerdale; “the perverse and stupid boy is as ill-disposed to fulfil that compact as the young lady herself. Would you believe it, he has positively had the folly to send me a letter full of praises of the beauty and goodness of some obscure girl he has met in London; and for this dream, of what he calls love, he would set aside the engagement with Ellinor—the absurdity of young men upon these subjects is not to be borne!”

“Nor of old ones either,” thought the lawyer, remembering the tear which he had seen fall upon the faded letter; but he only said, “At any rate, my lord, you escape, I think, such cause of dissatisfaction in Mr. Francis.”

“I hardly know,” replied the peer, pettishly; “he has been sentimentalising most horribly with the pretty daughter of the curate, but I think Francis has sense enough to avoid a mesalliance;—besides, I intimated to him this morning that Mrs. Wilson, the widow of that Manchester millocrat, who

bought that large estate of Blenkern, had given me a broad hint that she would not be unwilling to bestow her hand and wealth upon him : she is more than old enough to be his mother, it is true ; but then the chances of her dying are increased. But about this affair of Salton, Benedict, I shall know no peace till he is in our hands again ; I tremble lest while he is at liberty he should take a whim that it will be for his interest to risk everything for himself, and discover all that he knows to Musgrave."

"Your fears are unnecessary, my lord," answered the lawyer ; "his position is so much worse than ours, that if he forged the collar of the convict for our necks, he would twist a halter for his own. No, no ! his fears will, to a certain extent, keep him quiet ; yet I do wish myself he were in our hands again. I flatter myself I have a clue to track him ; for you must know it was no other than our worthy omnipresent friend, Lieutenant Conyers, who came in to the rescue when Harris and his son endeavoured to seize him after his parting with Musgrave : he has proceeded since to London, I know, and if we can discover the abode of the Lieutenant's mother and sister, and Mr. Salton, in his gratitude to the brother and son, should visit them, we shall quickly find him out."

"And so," said Lord Allerdale, "it was Lieutenant Conyers that released Salton ; Benedict, that young man takes the shape of a destiny against us,—he never appears but to do us harm."

"Hitherto he has not, indeed, my lord," responded the lawyer ; "but it shall go hard if I do not return him the favour with interest ; no man has yet stood in my path with impunity ; his star must be bright indeed if he is the first to brave me."

At this juncture of the conversation, one of the servants

entered with a letter for his lord ; it had a business-like appearance, and Lord Allerdale tossed it carelessly over to the lawyer to open. The greatest hypocrites, and most callous men of the world, cannot at all times prevent a sudden emotion of vexation or surprise appearing in the face ; and so strongly were both feelings imprinted on the features of Mr. Benedict as he glanced his eye over the letter, that Lord Allerdale hastily demanded the nature of its contents.

"It is a notice of a petition to the House of Lords," answered the lawyer, in a measured accent, "on the part of one *Aubrey Conyers*, for the title and estates of the Barony of Allerdale, which he claims as the lineal heir of Henry Conyers, the second son of the tenth baron of Allerdale, commonly supposed to have been slain at Malplaquet. The case is in excellent hands, for it is conducted by Horatio Neville, the barrister who is so famous for his indefatigable patience and skill in tracking out a claim for a dormant peerage : it looks well for Lieutenant Conyers, that such a man should appear in his behalf."

"Oh, heaven !" cried Lord Allerdale, as with a bitter groan he sunk back in his chair ; "said I not right, Benedict, when I told you but now, that young man took the shape of an evil destiny towards us ?"

"This is a time for action, my lord, and not for vain and superstitious repinings," said the lawyer, gravely. "Tell me, then—do not, I entreat you, deceive me, for your own sake,—have you any reason yourself to believe that this young man has a better title to the barony than your own ?"

"Alas, yes !" cried Lord Allerdale, "he is, I do believe, myself, the descendant of that elder branch of our family which we have supposed to be extinct."

Lord Allerdale uttered these words with the look and tone of one whose spirit was wholly broken and prostrate.

"My lord, you are suffering this blow to crush you," said Benedict, with a firmness worthy of a better cause ; "consider ; if you yield, all is indeed lost ; you have let me know the exact ground on which you stand—that is something ; many a cause is ruined when the professional man cannot extort the truth from his client. Look up, then, and remember all is not lost that is in danger ; the House of Lords are proverbially cautious and slow ; they must go into a committee, and documents will doubtless have to be procured from France, where I believe the family of Lieutenant Conyers was settled ; in the interim, he is miserably poor,—the poor are always at the mercy of the rich : and you, my lord, must gather up your energies, lay aside all fantastic scruples, and falter at no measure to secure his destruction, who will else most assuredly compass yours."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Good name, in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of our souls."

OTHELLO.

On the same day that Lord Allerdale received notice of the impending suit for the restitution of the title and estates which he unjustly held, Aubrey, who had obtained leave of absence from his regiment for some weeks, was passing up the Strand with his sister. Adela looked pale and feeble, and still wore her right hand in a sling, for it had been much lacerated by the broken carriage window, on the night of her attempted abduction by Mr. Rushton.

Nothing could exceed the gentlemanly and delicate kindness with which she had been on that occasion treated by Mr. Neville, who conveyed her safely to her own residence, and called early on the following morning to inquire after her health. Mrs. Conyers was so highly indignant at the treatment which her daughter had experienced that, ill as she herself was, she in company with Mrs. Windsor the next day visited the house in Clarges-street, with an intention of expressing her feelings to Mr. Rushton. On arriving there, however, she found Mrs. Jackson in great trouble and consternation at the loss of her lodgers, who she said had never returned from the party on the preceding night, and had early in the morning sent a person to pay their rent, and remove their luggage. The woman, despite her hollow and tricky character, was

so evidently in surprise herself, that Mrs. Conyers was content merely to give her some idea of the treatment which Adela had experienced, without any censure as to the careless manner in which she had introduced a person of at least doubtful reputation, to females of character and respectability. On his visit, which was paid after the return of Mrs. Conyers from Clarges-street, Mr. Neville did not on his part hesitate to say that Mr. Rushton was a man of rank, whom he had himself met in fashionable circles, and that indeed the gentleman's name was not Rushton at all.

"In our somewhat unpleasant interview of last night, however," said Mr. Neville, in conclusion, "he obliquely requested me to spare him the shame of the discovery of his true name to Miss Conyers and her friends; and I do not doubt that you, my dear madam," he added, more particularly addressing Mrs. Conyers, "will see the propriety of granting a request, the refusal of which would entail upon Lieutenant Conyers the necessity of risking his own life, by calling a man to account who is unworthy of such a risk, and whom I think we may very well leave to the mortification of his disappointment."

This suggestion of Mr. Neville so far alarmed the natural tenderness of Mrs. Conyers for her son, that she readily admitted its propriety. Aubrey, however, arrived in town that very day, and it was not possible to conceal from him the outline of the adventure that had befallen his sister, who on her part carefully refrained from mentioning to her brother that his colonel had been one of the visitors at the house of Mr. Silvertree, apprehensive that such an acknowledgment might lead to a discovery of Mr. Rushton, which would place Aubrey himself in peril.

It was a singular and fortunate chance, as Aubrey and his

family thought, which had thrown Adela upon the temporary protection of Mr. Neville, whose name in his peculiar study of the law was so famous, that it was well known to Aubrey, and slightly even to his mother and sister. With the greatest caution, however, and with abundant reservations, did Aubrey make known to them these unexpected hopes of a change in his fortune, which it was not possible wholly to conceal. All his prudence, however, did not suffice to restrain their raptures at a prospect of which they would not doubt the realization. The papers left by Aubrey's father were of course immediately and carefully examined; and proved so satisfactory to Mr. Neville, that he at once undertook the cause; one most important record being a letter from Walter, the elder brother of Henry Conyers, which bore a date later than that of the battle of Malplaquet, and in which the writer severely reproached his brother with his proposed marriage with the daughter of the maire of some small French town. This marriage had it appeared by other letters taken place, nor did it seem to Mr. Neville that there would be any great difficulty in procuring all the papers necessary to substantiate Aubrey's claim, with the exception of those relating to a marriage with a member of the noble family of Boisjolin; this lady, the great grandmother of Aubrey, perished with her husband in the outbreak of the first revolution, leaving an only child, a youth about twenty years of age, the grandfather of Aubrey, and who, aware of his close relationship to the Allerdale family, had written to England for assistance in his pecuniary distress; his letters had been received by the father of the present Lord Allerdale, and had occasioned him great alarm for the tenure of his title and estates, which indeed only the sudden death of Mons. Eugene Conyers, the grandfather of Aubrey, had kept a little longer in

the possession of the Baron and his family. A close examination of the papers and documents submitted to him by Aubrey, convinced Mr. Neville that to carry out the claim, a journey to France would be necessary, and this journey he proposed, so soon as he had prepared the main features of the case for the consideration of the House of Lords, to undertake himself: for not only was his legal acumen requisite in prosecuting the search after any missing papers, but he knew that the professional duties of Aubrey might render it very inconvenient for him to be long absent; and beyond even this, Horatio Neville could not fail to observe the depressed circumstances of the family, and he was anxious in a delicate manner to spare them as much as possible every expense.

In no other liberal profession do the extremes of acute intellect and high gentlemanly feeling so strongly contrast with every thing that is malignant, mean, and base, as in that of the law. A nobler character does not exist than that of the man who brings forth all the stores of his hard weary studies, his keen discriminating thought, his glowing eloquence, to succour the oppressed, to unravel the web of iniquity; nor does a creature more vile and loathsome cumber the earth than the wretch who, like Nicholas Benedict, uses the arts and chicaneries of the law, the devices of his own crafty and cruel mind, to accomplish the ruin of the unfortunates, the poor, whose poverty and misfortunes have brought them within the baleful sphere of his influence. Some remarks to this purpose were made by Aubrey to his sister, as they walked up the Strand, after a visit to Mr. Neville at his chambers in the Temple. To these remarks Adela entirely assented, and even outstripped her brother in commendation of the liberal dealing and graceful manners of the eminent barrister. It is just possible that

the circumstance of Mr. Neville being a young and handsome man, most delicately attentive to herself, might have a little excited the enthusiasm of Adela, though when teased about this handsome man of the law by her plain-spoken landlady, Mrs. Windsor, Adela had more than once stoutly maintained that it was his conduct she admired, and that she should esteem him not a whit the less if he were old and ugly. "Nevertheless, Miss Adela," said the landlady, laughing, "if Mr. Neville were old and ugly, there would not be the same chance of my Charlotte's having a lot of fine wedding dresses to make for you, when this law business of Mr. Aubrey is settled. So let us have no more blushes and fibs; it is not your brother's law business alone that brings that handsome young gentleman here so often."

Poor Mrs. Windsor, like many other well-meaning people of her class, was not quite aware of the moment when a joke ceases to be one, and she had said so much about Mr. Neville that Adela as much as possible avoided all mention of him when at home; and as she really did in her heart feel for him all the admiration which Mrs. Windsor accused her of, it was a sort of relief to praise him with Aubrey, who, in his innocence and ignorance of all love affairs save his own, saw nothing at all but a common enough friendship and gratitude in the words or demeanour either of his sister or the young barrister. Time always passed very quickly with Adela when Mr. Neville was the subject of conversation, and though she had complained of feebleness when she left his chambers, she managed the length of the Strand so well, that she was quite surprised when she found herself at Charing Cross. Business connected with his regiment made it necessary for Aubrey to call at the Horse Guards, and not choosing to take his sister there with him, he was about to

propose for her to wait for him at a pastry-cook's, when she uttered an exclamation of fear and surprise, and sunk so suddenly back in a dead faint, that it was with difficulty he saved her from falling ; while at the same moment the well-known voice of Colonel Colman gave him the salutations of the morning. Hurriedly answering his superior officer, Aubrey now conveyed his sister into the pastry cook's shop, for the passers-by, perceiving that the young lady was ill, were stopping and crowding round, and leaving their own business to attend to other people's in the fashion which is so common in London, and also so very polite. Into the pastry-cook's shop, however, Aubrey was followed by Colonel Colman, and a gentleman with whom he was arm in arm, and in this gentleman Aubrey, to his surprise, recognised Edmund Conyers. That honourable slip of nobility, however, did not seem very well pleased with this proceeding of his companion, for even in the confusion of the moment, Aubrey noticed that he hung back, and muttered something to the colonel about not intruding on Mr. Conyers ; to which the military gentleman replied on his part by a slight but sneering laugh. Occupied though Aubrey was at the moment with the illness of his sister, this behaviour of Edmund still awakened his surprise, as he knew that Mr. Neville's notice of the threatened suit would only reach Allerdale that morning, and it was absolutely impossible that Edmund could be aware of it. The mystery, however, was very quickly solved, for as Lord Allerdale's heir and the colonel still stood by when Adela recovered from her swoon, in the bewilderment and fear of the moment she forgot all the injunctions she had received both from her mother and Mr. Neville, as to the necessity of concealing from her brother the knowledge of the person by whom she had been so cruelly insulted, and throwing her

arms round Aubrey, she cried in a voice full of wildness and terror, "Oh, take me away, dear Aubrey, take me home; that is the man Rushton, from whom I was saved by Mr. Neville."

Mr. Edmund Conyers, while Adela still continued insensible, had stood by with a flushed countenance and uneasy air, like one chained to the stake, and detained by his friend the colonel, who with a malicious pleasure in the contemplation of that discovery, held him fast by the arm. Now, however, that the discovery was made, he ceased to flinch, and raised his bold blue eyes with a look of defiance to the flashing dark ones of Aubrey, as, with a lip white and quivering, and with a voice broken by passion, he said, "Am I really to understand that you, Mr. Edmund Conyers, could be at once so mean and so audacious, as to attempt the abduction of a young lady of spotless character, after having previously insulted her by passing upon her your mistress for your wife?"

"Look you, Lieutenant Conyers," answered Edmund, "the trespasses which I have dared to commit, I do not fear to acknowledge; I did suffer Miss Conyers to visit, in the capacity of a governess, a female who was not my wife, but I did not at first know she was your sister; and when her beauty and talents charmed me so much that I was willing to overlook the disparity of our fortune and rank, and really elevate her to the position which she had supposed Mrs. Rushton to occupy, I think any little abruptness of proceeding into which I was urged, both you and Miss Conyers might readily excuse. If you are not pleased with this explanation, I am ready to give you any other kind of satisfaction you may require!"

Insolent and assuming as was the matter of this speech,

the tone and manner in which it was pronounced was much more so; the careless bravado of attitude, the mocking smile, the contemptuous eye, all implied as clearly as they were meant to do Mr. Edmund Conyers' supreme consciousness of the immeasurable superiority of his position over that of Aubrey and his sister, and that there was no amount of insult which they were not bound to forgive when he should condescend to offer what he held as reparation.

"I am not pleased with this explanation, sir," answered Aubrey, "and I shall demand further satisfaction. I do not consider the affront of deluding my sister into association with an immoral woman, in the first instance, is any way compensated by the illegal endeavour of an immoral man to command the gift of her hand in the second. Sir, you are such a disgrace to your education and your rank, that an honest peasant or mechanic is more worthy of respect than you are."

"Very well, sir," replied Edmund, fiercely; "I have rooms at the Albany, and shall expect to hear from you this evening."

While this altercation went forward, Adela had been forced by some of the women belonging to the shop into the parlour that adjoined it; and though the pastry-cook, with the assistance of his men, had forced the door to, the crowd without were pressing round the window with eager faces to get a peep of what was passing within. After his last speech Edmund Conyers would, doubtless, have walked quietly away, but Colonel Colman was by no means content to part with his share in the quarrel, therefore, with a sneering laugh and loud insolent tone, he said to Aubrey, "It is no business of mine, Mr. Conyers, but I must say you are acting as little as possible like the man of sense and honour you would be taken for; without offence to the young lady, your sister, it may be

said she is scarce the person on whose behalf men's lives should be risked; and really both you and she might feel flattered by Mr. Edmund's offer, which was what you had no right to expect, for it is not Diana or her nymphs who visit at the house of Silvertree the money-lender, where I had myself the honour of meeting the beautiful Miss Conyers."

With the outward coolness and patience which is only the result of the most violent passion, Aubrey listened to this speech; but as the gallant colonel stood while speaking with the shop-door in his hand, Edmund having already quitted it, the last words were scarce out of his mouth when the strong hand of Aubrey was laid upon his collar, and he was ejected in a most undignified manner into the street, to the immediate dispersion of the crowd, and the infinite detriment of his costume, as the early part of the morning had been wet, and the pavement about Charing Cross was in the condition it always is in when the weather is wet.

CHAPTER XX.

"He stood—some dread was on his face ;
Soon hatred settled in its place ;
It rose not with the reddening flush
Of transient anger's hasty blush ;
But pale as marble o'er the tomb,
Whose ghastly whiteness aids its gloom."

THE GIAOUR.

It required all Colonel Colman's slavish adulation of rank to induce him to suffer the hostile meeting which was offered to Aubrey by Edmund Conyers. Furious at the indignity which he had yet so justly merited, he wished at once to place Aubrey under arrest for striking him, his superior officer. He at first yielded this point out of courtesy to Edmund, but an express from Allerdale in the evening made him very willing that Aubrey should stand rather the chance of being shot at once in a duel, than suffer the temporary disgrace which it was in the power of his colonel to inflict, to be possibly and probably rewarded with a coronet and rich estates. Selfish, dissolute, and insolent as was Edmund Conyers, there was yet about him a kind of dashing frankness, a reckless bravery in the encounter with danger, either mental or physical, which glossed over even the worst of his faults. He admitted that he had grossly insulted Aubrey, and he would offer him satisfaction. He was immeasurably shocked and surprised to find that in that same man whom

he had so insulted, existed a claimant to those honours of which he had till now believed himself to be the heir; but boldly and at once did he resolve to declare among his acquaintance the peril in which he was placed. Edmund Conyers knew enough of the world to be well aware how malice is robbed of its best triumph by those who forestall it.

Yet something of a more uneasy feeling than that with which he had at first contemplated it weighed upon his mind with regard to his hostile meeting with Aubrey, after he received the strange news from Allerdale; for alike with both parties, it seemed to invest that meeting with a sinister character: too great, now, was the stake which both he and Aubrey had in the life of each other, though much greater for him; for should Aubrey fall by his hand, might not he be called an assassin, who had made a convenient quarrel with a man who stood so much in his way? But if the honour of Edmund Conyers was sensitive on this point, that of Aubrey was no less so—he stood altogether in the most painful position, nor would he waive his right to the meeting, which, apart from the lawsuit now pending, Edmund would not have hesitated a moment to offer. Aubrey considered, therefore, that an exchange of shots was necessary to the credit of both parties, and the result of his meeting with Edmund Conyers was, to him a severe wound in the shoulder, and to his antagonist a slight one in the fleshy part of the arm. For though he at first hesitated to encounter Aubrey, Edmund Conyers had not the generosity which would have made him refrain from returning the fire. Very much grieved, indeed, was Colonel Colman at this termination of an affair which he had most sincerely hoped would send Aubrey to look for coronets in another world, and he would have been quite inconsolable but that he had the court-martial in reserve for him. Before

this court, however, in his present condition he could not be brought ; and the colonel eminently disgusted both Edmund Conyers, and a young ensign of the —— who had acted as Aubrey's second, by the sullen look he assumed as the surgeon in attendance declared that it would be ten days or a fortnight at least before the wounded man would be able to leave his bed.

The affair of the duel had, before it took place, been carefully concealed from Mrs. Conyers, and as, on his arrival in town, Aubrey had taken lodgings in Cecil-street, in the Strand, it was not difficult to continue that concealment. Adela could not, of course, be kept in equal ignorance, though she knew not the day appointed for the meeting, but visiting her brother's lodgings every morning, she was there when he was brought home, and her horror, when she found that a hostile encounter had actually taken place was so great as to leave her at first unable to comprehend that the results, though serious, were not likely to prove fatal. On this occasion again did Horatio Neville rescue the poor Adela from the excess of her misery ; he condoled with her, he reasoned, he pointed out the ill effects both to Aubrey and her mother of her indulging selfishly in her grief, and to a certain degree restored her serenity by proving to her the necessity for a show of it. Somewhat soothed at last by the arguments of Neville, at once judicious and tender, Adela yielded to his persuasions that she would return to Mrs. Windsor's, and trust her brother to the care of his landlady and a woman whom she had procured to attend on him till the morning ; and Neville himself then withdrew, with a promise again to see his friend before night. While he was still confined to his bed, Aubrey was one evening, after his sister had left him, informed that a strange lady, who refused to give her name,

desired to see him. "A very tall, fine-looking lady she is, sir," said the woman; "and she says that you were very kind to her a bit ago when you was down in Cumberland, and that she is sure you will see her."

The thoughts of Aubrey immediately reverted to the young woman Magdalen, whom he had encountered at the inn upon the heath, and as he had always connected her departure for London with the dilemma from which he had on the same occasion rescued Edmund Conyers, he was not at all surprised when the elegantly dressed woman who presently entered his apartment proved to be no other than Magdalen herself. Her sumptuous attire, however, the velvet and costly furs in which she was clad, and the rings that glittered on her fingers, contrasted but sadly with her altered face, which, instead of the look of melancholy pride which Aubrey remarked on their first meeting, now wore an expression of gloomy and yet, if the flashing of the dark eye might be credited, of fierce despair. The beautiful lips, too, of Magdalen were pale, and the red spot that burned upon her cheek indicated fever both of mind and body.

"You know me again, I do not doubt, Mr. Conyers," said she, removing her bonnet and shaking back her dark locks, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon her altered but still beautiful face, the fine features of which seemed even to win a kind of grandeur from the print of anguish. "I have hesitated long, Mr. Conyers," she continued, sinking into a chair, and speaking now with downcast eyes and a subdued tone, "I have hesitated long, ere I dared obtrude myself upon you; it is so dreadful, in the presence of a man of honour, to own myself the vile, degraded thing I am; I know, too, that you may well resent my presumption in intruding myself on your innocent sister, for I, alas, am the Mrs. Rushton.

of whom you must have heard her speak. But indeed, indeed, Mr. Conyers, though guilty myself, I can reverence purity in others, and I hoped from her to acquire the manners and accomplishments of a lady, that I might win Edmund to keep his promise and make me his wife. I have heard now of this shameful affair of the duel and its cause, and that you, too, claim to be the real lord of Allerdale, and I have ventured to obtrude myself on you to make two inquiries; one is, whether you have a strong expectation of obtaining the title and estates,—and the other is to ask whether, under any circumstances, your sister would become the wife of Edmund; for he loves her, I know he does,—loves her as deeply and truly as he can love, not as he has loved me.”

“It is difficult and painful for me to speak upon this subject,” answered Aubrey. “I think I can venture to say, that my sister will under no circumstances become the wife of Mr. Edmund Conyers; but, alas, Mrs. Rushton, what advantage do you propose to yourself from that? Mr. Conyers has already proved himself the most fickle of men; he is as likely to forsake you for another as for Adela.”

“I do not think he will do that; I hope for his own sake he will not,” answered Magdalen; “and oh, Lieutenant Conyers,” she added, in a softer tone, and with her dark eyes swimming in tears, “if you really are the heir of the title and estates of Allerdale, how coldly will the world look on him, how altered will be his condition; and whom will he find in that sorrow to stand by him with such a love as mine? If your sister does but continue steadily to reject him I am content, and in the downfall of his worldly fortunes he may be glad to seek solace from one faithful heart, and yet repair the wrong he has done me.” Satisfied as he was of the hollow and selfish nature of Edmund Conyers, Aubrey’s heart bled

for the unhappy woman who was placing all her trust in the balance against his constancy, and he muttered something even about his reported engagement with Ellinor Musgrave. "Oh, I do not fear for that," said Magdalen, with a scornful laugh; "the lady, I have heard him say, is as ill disposed to fulfil that engagement as Edmund himself can be; nay, if his surmises are correct, Miss Musgrave is more likely to be the lady of Allerdale if he loses the title than if he retains it; at any rate, if Miss Conyers refuses his hand, I do not, I will not, fear any other rival."

With these words Magdalen took her departure, leaving Aubrey surprised and almost startled by the savage energy with which she had last spoken.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ There, at the moated grange, resides
This dejected Mariana.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THREE months had passed away, three slow miserable months. How very slow are the months that are miserable ; how dully the hours drag into days, and the days into weeks. How much of undeserved wrong may innocence suffer in such a space, how much of maddening remorse, of unavailing regret, may be encountered by guilt. The suffering of innocence had been during those three months the lot of Aubrey Conyers and his family ; a suffering more intense, more bitter in its humiliation of extreme poverty than any they had yet known. Still, however bitter their tears, however nauseous the cup they were destined to drain even to the dregs, it had not in it the frenzy of the draught presented to the lips of the fair, and, alas, erring Magdalen Rushton. Oh there is not in this world a pang to equal that of the woman of proud and lofty soul who has forfeited her honour, who despises herself for the loss, and, to her agony, her tenfold shame, still loves her betrayer, loves where she cannot esteem, where her reason utterly condemns ; for love is irrespective of reason, especially in a woman, who often feels herself irresistibly compelled to love the man whom she knows to be quite unworthy of her esteem. After the affair of the duel with Aubrey

Conyers, the heir of Lord Allerdale had lodged his beautiful mistress in a cottage at Hendon, and in the first mortification of his rejection by Adela he had exhibited such an apparent warmth of affection, that the poor Magdalen fondly flattered herself that he would yet repair her wrongs. After a time, however, his mood altered; the suit with Aubrey progressed, and Lord Allerdale, who knew what immense liabilities he had incurred in money matters unknown to his sons, was compelled to reduce the splendid allowance which he had hitherto made to Edmund; and Edmund, whose extravagance had always outstript even that splendid allowance, for the first time in his life found himself seriously annoyed for want of money, especially since the story of the claim of Aubrey to the title and estates of Allerdale was now so widely spread, that it had become known among the fashionable tradesmen with whom Edmund had been in the habit of running very long bills, but who, upon hearing that story, suddenly found themselves unable to give such lengthened credit. On the other hand, when Edmund complained of his difficulties, he met only reproaches from his father, for not having already secured the hand of Ellinor Musgrave, and with it the estates of Ravenglas.

The fact was that, with all his apparent easy good humour, the strong ingredient of selfishness in the character of Edmund Conyers could not fail in the end to produce mischievous results; his vanity also had been wounded both by Ellinor's utter indifference and Adela Conyers' determined rejection of his honourable suit; and the whole of the latter mortification, and much of the former, he attributed to Aubrey, against whom, in contradiction to his former friendship, he had now conceived the most bitter dislike. Under these circumstances, it was no wonder that, as one evil

thought follows up another, Edmund Conyers began to reflect with himself that, after all, Aubrey might get possession of the title and estates, and that in such a case, the lands of Ravenglas would afford no very mean compensation for the loss ; and besides that, as he was now well aware of the attachment subsisting between Ellinor and Aubrey, he would by securing her hand be able to mix some portion of bitterness with the worldly triumph of his rival. Yes, for the sake of securing the lands of Ravenglas, and afflicting Aubrey, the once kind and careless Edmund already contemplated the basest action that a man can commit, that of marrying for money, and marrying too a woman who he was well assured did not, nor ever would love him. Neither man nor woman; however, becomes wicked all at once, and Edmund could not so far overcome his better feelings but that he despised himself for the very part which he was at the same time determined to play. He could not dupe his reason, or pacify his conscience; he knew well that he would marry Ellinor for money and revenge, and he felt that he was therein both mean and cruel; but the conviction did not amend his conduct, it only embittered his temper, so that upon his unfortunate dependants he wreaked his displeasure with himself, and became indeed so tyrannical and insolent that both his groom and his French valet quitted his service for another.

By this change in the disposition of Edmund, it may be readily believed that the unhappy Magdalen did not fail to suffer. With bitter reproaches, as though she had been the source of his disappointment, on the night of his attempted abduction of Adela, he had hurried her away from Clarges-street, and the next day fixed her in the cottage at Hendon, where he suffered her to remain in solitude, save when in a particular ill humour he sought her company, because she

alone would bear his insolence patiently. Poor Magdalen ! she did bear patiently with all ; patiently as a woman bears, whose one fatal error has left her without a hope, save in the honour of him who has already proved that he has no honour. To deprive him, too, of the plea of her defective education, she even forced herself, during the long and melancholy days of his absence, to pursue those studies which she had commenced under the instructions of Adela,—studies now most distasteful to her, not from want of capacity, but because it would have been a relief to her aching heart to spend her lonely hours in remorseful meditation and tears. Yet still, when her lover deigned to visit her, whatever might be his mood, hers was that of smiles and a glad welcome. She never reproached him even with a look,—she endeavoured to soothe his irritation, she lived at the smallest possible expense, and turned away his wrath with soft words. This faithful love, this gentle demeanour, should have won a better return from Edmund Conyers than harsh words and sullen or contemptuous looks ; the more so, as Magdalen was naturally the proudest, the most imperious of women, a creature of strong passion, energetic in thought, and firm of purpose. Yet she, the superb beauty, the lofty of soul, was bowed by the infatuation of her love into the meekest, the most patient suffering of her sex. In this, however, the poor Magdalen did but fulfil what appears the destiny of women of superior minds, for never was intellect in women a shield against the delusions of love ; rather it seems that women of fine minds love with a self-abandonment unknown to inferior natures, for imagination governs all women more or less, and most of all the woman of genius, and that imagination invests the object of the heart's idolatry with the glow of its own brightness. Thus, then, while the world laughs and

wonders, looking at the very inferior merit, mental and sometimes personal too, of the men who have been the objects of the most devoted attachment on the part of women of superior ability, the actual man whom the world beholds is a being unknown to the woman who seems to adore him, for her imagination has graced him with qualities that are not his own, and it is to the creature of her imagination that she is devoted. A dangerous no less than unhappy destiny is this; dangerous when the moral qualities of the man are greatly deficient, and his mental powers not very acute; for women of strong passions and strong minds, if too rudely awakened from their dream, have in their disappointment a fatal fury, a pity for themselves, for their own crushed hearts, for their wasted wealth of love, that leads them to seek a revenge appalling in its magnitude as their tenderness was insane in its devotion. But Edmund Conyers recked not of this; vain, frivolous, selfish, and unthinking, the blind attachment of poor Magdalen was the very weapon which he turned against her. He wearied, not only of her fondness, but of the meekness with which she bore her wrongs; her patience he called insipidity, it would have relieved his bosom of its load of ill humour if he could have provoked her to a quarrel. He determined at last that he would do so, and he effected his purpose.

It was on a dull stormy evening in February, for the winter lingered long, and sleet and snow were falling fast, that Edmund Conyers, especially exasperated by dunning applications from more than one impertinent tradesman, ordered his horse to be saddled, and in spite of the inclemency of the weather set out unattended to Hendon.

The cottage in which he had there lodged poor Magdalen was one of those pretty showy residences which now abound

in the neighbourhood of London ; a cottage with a trim garden, and a stable, and dining and drawing rooms, and it may be a spare bed-room, and green-house. This cottage, from its style and size, might fairly have occupied three or four female servants ; but Magdalen, painfully anxious to spare her lover every possible expense, employed only one respectable middle-aged woman, who acted both as cook and housemaid, while her husband filled the offices of butler and gardener, and occasionally, when Edmund rode over unattended, that of groom.

As for Magdalen, she had been the whole of the day referred to industriously practising on the piano some of the Scotch and Welsh melodies which she knew that, in utter defiance of modern opera and his generally fashionable tastes, Edmund Conyers greatly admired.

Magdalen had a fine ear, a voice of great compass and beauty, and a flexible finger. Had her talents for music been early cultivated, they would alone have secured her from want, and therefore perhaps from temptation, for poverty not only tempts worse than love, but it leads the unwary into temptation.

The unremitting toil of Magdalen had enabled her already to attain a tolerable proficiency on the piano, and industry, which never fails in its reward, accorded, under the influence of the divine science of music, some relief from her bitter mental anxiety. There is, indeed, no relief such as music affords to the wearied mind ; violent, terrible indeed must be the distraction of that mind to which sweet sounds will not afford some temporary relief.

Absorbed then in the music before her, Magdalen noticed not how time fled, and when the evening closed she wondered how the day had passed so quickly ; but occupation

is ever the best security, not only against weariness, but vice.

The mind then of Magdalen on that evening, lifted out of itself by the concord of sweet sounds, seemed capable only of joyous and pleasurable emotions; and though the inclement state of the weather forbade her to hope for the presence of Edmund at Hendon, yet a sense of happiness, a brighter expectation for the future than she had known for some time, took possession of her heart. Fatal illusion, bright glance of the sunbeam ere it sunk for ever behind the dark thunder-clouds of frowning fate!

Magdalen had heard that Aubrey and his friends were strong in their hope of establishing his claim to the title and estates of Allerdale, and surely there never was selfishness more excusable than hers when selfishly she wished that they might not be disappointed, for, deprived of wealth and rank, might not Edmund be tempted to do justice to her patient and unwearied love? Lost, then, in a dream of a future which she fondly flattered herself would be more innocent and happier than the past, Magdalen sat gazing on the fire, and unheeding the storm that beat without, till roused by the tramp of her lover's horse on the gravel path before the cottage.

Her heart bounded at the unexpected happiness of his visit; she stayed not to meet him in the dining-room, but hurried herself to open the hall door, and received him in her arms as he entered the house. Coldly extricating himself from her embrace, Edmund turned back to give the man servant, who had hurried after his mistress, some directions as to the stabling of his horse, and then in silence, and with a slow step, he followed Magdalen to the sitting-room.

The worse than indifference of his manner had instantaneously dashed the joy she had felt at his visit; the blood

seemed to retreat like ice upon her heart, and a thousand gloomy, horrible forebodings displaced the bright visions in which she had so lately indulged.

The first words uttered by Edmund showed his captious mood. Poor Magdalen had, since she left her piano, been sitting by the light of the fire, and with the blinds undrawn. Like many other enthusiasts, she loved that doubtful, uncertain glow of the winter fire, the grey twilight which invests the common domestic scene with a kind of shadowy obscurity, and is yet so full of comfort, as the gentle radiance falls softly on the furniture, and the tall trees wave duskily against the window pane. Time had been when Edmund, too, had loved to sit with her in that doubtful light, and discuss plans and prospects as bright as any that her foolish heart had vainly nursed on that very evening, destined to be the most fatal of her life. But it was not so now; times were changed, and Edmund was changed too: his first words were a captious, angry inquiry as to why she was sitting in the dark; his next a malediction with which, as a gentleman, he was not in the habit of staining his lips, because he stumbled over one of the chairs, a mischance which had occurred, he said, through her not having the lamps lighted. Poor Magdalen hastened to ring the bell, that old Susan, her only female attendant, might bring in the lamp; and in the interim, still in the same sharp, ill-natured tone, Mr. Conyers demanded, "How often he was to tell her, that he did not approve of her meeting him at the door? Can you not understand, my dear Magdalen," he said, "that the ecstasies of the exceeding love with which you are pleased to honour me, are somewhat ridiculous in the eyes of other people? and I have no mind to be made a topic of ridicule with any one, and least of all with my servants."

The tears rose to Magdalen's eyes at this cruel reproof, but

she hastily turned aside her head to conceal them, for Susan at that moment entered with the lamp.

Her precaution, however, did not avail her, for the servant had scarcely withdrawn when Mr. Conyers exclaimed, "What! in tears again, Magdalen? really, it is not fair that you should complain of my not visiting you oftener; do you suppose that I have not trial and vexation enough about this infernal affair of Lieutenant Conyers, but that you must add to my annoyances, and bore me with your tears and your doleful looks? I do wish you would leave off whimpering like a baby, and act as a woman of sense, if it be possible, which I much doubt."

The barbarity of this speech roused the long dormant spirit of Magdalen, and drying her tears she said, "You may doubt, Edmund, whether I can act as becomes a woman of sense; I can pardon that doubt in you, in whom I have trusted with an infatuation that was the grossest of folly."

"Oh, madam!" said Edmund, "I perfectly understand that sneer, and the reproach it is intended to convey; but if I am to be insulted with your reproaches, when I wished for a quiet evening, I really must return to town, in spite of the unpleasant state of the weather."

"I have no wish to insult, no wish to reproach you, Edmund!" said the unhappy Magdalen, again unable to restrain her tears. "Alas, I have no right, as I certainly have no wish, to reproach any one but myself."

"And I understand that, too, madam," said Mr. Conyers, who was determined to quarrel, as the wolf was with the poor lamb who ventured to drink at the same stream. "I understand that, too—that affectation of reproaching only yourself: you would intimate by that, how high a value you set upon your honour; how nice a sense you possess of female propriety;

and of course imply how black a villain he must be who could lead you from the paths of purity and peace—that is the conventional novel phrase, I believe.”

“I wish to intimate nothing, Edmund, nothing beyond the plain meaning of my words, that I consider my guilt is greater than yours, my folly all my own,” answered Magdalen.

“My guilt, madam!” retorted Edmund; “let me beseech you not to limit your speech to so delicate a phrase, where I am concerned, for my folly was at least equal to yours.”

“I do not desire to wrangle with you for a word, Edmund,” said Magdalen, “but it would, I think, be hard to prove that any folly in your sex can equal that of the woman who sacrifices her good name.”

“You mistake, madam, you mistake!” replied Edmund, bitterly. “What think you the world says of the folly of a man who has embarrassed himself with a connexion which has blighted the best prospects of his life—who has sacrificed father, friends, the hand of a lady of birth and fortune, to his foolish tenderness for a woman, whom he removed in his weakness from the deepest penury, the lowest class of life, to opulence and ease—and whose gratitude is shown only by muttered reproaches, and dismal looks, and tears!”

As he spoke this, Edmund Conyers started from his seat, and paced the room with a hurried angry step. The face of Magdalen, meanwhile, had become lividly pale, but the tears were dried from her eyes. Harsh and cruel words she had before heard from the lips of her seducer, but never such words as these. She was silent for a few minutes; she could not command courage, she had not voice to speak; and Edmund, flinging himself again on his seat, fixed his eyes moodily on the fire. Cold, and even sullen looks, too, had Magdalen before encountered from Edmund, but never such

a look as he turned upon her, when she at length found voice to ask how she had blighted his prospects?

"How, madam?" furiously answered Edmund Conyers, for the consciousness how bitterly he had wronged the unhappy woman only exasperated the anger he felt towards her—"do you ask how you have injured my prospects? Has not my wretched infatuation for you exposed me, from first to last, to a thousand ills? Was not my life nearly sacrificed by the horrible ruffian, your uncle, and his sons, on the first night of my meeting with Lieutenant Conyers? Should I ever have known the lieutenant had I not so met him, and does not my acquaintance with him promise to be the destruction of myself and my family? for it is probable, nay, almost certain, that he would not have made his claim upon the peerage, had he not been by a chance so miserable for us thrown in our way, so that the matter of his origin was in a manner forced upon his attention. And then when this, this irreparable evil has risen from my wretched attachment to yourself, a chance still more unfortunate throws the sister of this young man into your society; and with all due submission, madam, and though I was the individual favoured by your little lapse of moral conduct, I am, nevertheless, bound to say that it rather unfitted you to be the companion of Miss Adela Conyers."

The bitterness, the unworthy malice, of this taunt, was, perhaps, scarce felt by the unfortunate to whom it was addressed, in her overpowering sense of its cruelty.

"True, true, Edmund," she exclaimed, "I was indeed an unfit companion for the pure, the innocent Adela; but oh, should yours be the tongue to remind me how far I was beneath her—how unworthy I was to be honoured by her friendship!"

The tone of piercing agony in which these words were uttered, the streaming tears by which they were accompanied, served only to exasperate Edmund Conyers, for they forced upon him the conviction of the vileness of his own conduct, and his character was of that perverse kind, that, sooner than avow and repair one injustice, he would back it with a thousand. The tears, the anguish of Magdalen, too, gave him inexpressible pain, for Edmund Conyers had abundance of that false sensibility which recoils from witnessing distress, but never prevents its possessor from inflicting it.

"Madam, madam," he said, "despite your polite imputations of cruelty and guilt, you will please to understand, that I have a heart not quite so hard as adamant, or the nether millstone. I cannot bear this ; your tears, your reproaches, your misery—for alas, I believe that you are miserable, distract me ! Accursed be the day on which we met, a day fatal to us both. You have not the mind, Magdalen, to accommodate yourself to the position to which you have sunk—but that mind should have prevented your fall. Unhappily, it has not done so ; but I cannot endure to be tormented with your remorse, and to make you my wife is impossible."

Those last words inexplicably inspired the ill-fated Magdalen with the very hope which they were intended to destroy. She, naturally the proud, the unyielding, subdued by her mighty love and her deep despair, sunk upon her knees before the destroyer of her innocence and peace, the only foe she had ever known. A wild gleam of joy, of anxious expectation, lighted up her face, even through its mist of sorrow and of tears.

"Impossible !" she exclaimed, "oh no, no, not impossible, dearest Edmund ; the sin was in committing wrong ; there is

none in repairing it. Oh, Edmund, recollect your promises—how entirely I trusted you, how solemnly you vowed that you would make me your wife. And what a wife will I not be to you! spurn, starve, neglect me—give me but one kind word in a dozen years—the thought that I am your wife, my beloved, will make me bear patiently with all. Your wife! oh, what is it that a wife cannot, that she will not endure? To be the wife of the man on whom she dotes, what higher happiness is there for woman upon earth? Alas! that I cannot offer you wealth or rank, that I cannot be your pure and innocent bride! but you, Edmund, for whose sake I erred, will not be for ever harsh against me for that. And if this cruel law-suit ends for you disastrously, what is the loss of wealth or rank to such a love as mine? I will toil for you then, Edmund, endure for you the meanest drudgery, without complaint.”

The utter self-abandonment, the devoted self-sacrificing love of the unfortunate Magdalen, so far touched the heart of Edmund Conyers, made hard and selfish rather by adventitious circumstances than by nature, that he suffered her to proceed in her pathetic appeal without interruption, though his resolution was unshaken never to grant its prayer, never to make to Magdalen the only real reparation he could offer for the great wrong which he had inflicted on her. But her concluding allusion to his worldly circumstances was unfortunate; it roused the bitter and bad feelings which had been called into existence by the claims of Aubrey—by his duel with him, and by the rejection of his honourable suit on the part of Adela. Then, too, Edmund Conyers again remembered that Ellinor and Aubrey loved each other, and that the peace of the new Lord Allerdale would sorely suffer if he was denied to claim Ellinor Musgrave as his bride. That

day, too, that very day, Edmund had received a letter from his father, urging upon him in the strongest terms the necessity of his union with Ellinor, and assuring him that neither the young lady nor her uncle would dare reject his proffered hand. In fact, Edmund Conyers had, on the receipt of that letter, resolved to comply with its injunctions, and he had written over to Hendon, with the intention of proposing a separation, and a provision to Magdalen. A thousand bad feelings urged the misguided Edmund to these proceedings—hatred of Aubrey, exasperation against Ellinor, weariness of Magdalen, and though last, not perhaps least, the certainty of securing the lands and revenue of Ravenglas, if all should fail at Allerdale. Never were there more cogent reasons for acting as man often has acted, than those which might have been advanced by Edmund Conyers; there are many whose conduct has been equally base and cruel, without the excuse of a situation so trying as his. He had not even what many men in his situation would have had, the hard-hearted effrontery coolly to throw off the woman he had betrayed; he must have a quarrel to excuse himself: a piece of sentimentality which a fashionable friend, to whom he had confided his difficulty, had styled infinitely amusing. “You should recollect, Conyers,” said this person, “what the condition of your pretty Magdalen would have been, had you never condescended to notice her—the wife of a miner, I suppose, or at best of some little farmer. You do not propose, of course, to leave her without a provision, since you have no fault to find with her except being so much in love with you, which after a time, I own, becomes tiresome enough. But still, though it justifies you in releasing yourself from her society, it compels you as a gentleman to provide for her; and I know you well enough to be sure that her allowance will

be ample ; and then, pray, what reason will she have to complain ? She has already known elegance and comfort, which she would never have known but for you, and she will have the means to live in comfort all her life, and get a husband, if she wishes for one, in a better class than she would otherwise have looked to. Truly, it appears to me that the lady will be no loser in the affair ; and were the case mine, I should take it in hand in a very business-like way, and write to her, offering her a provision, and proposing a separation at once. Perhaps, though, as she is so terribly romantic, it would be better to intrust the matter to your lawyer ; it would save you some annoyance."

"Oh no, no ; I could not do that," said Edmund ; "poor Magdalen ! such a step would kill her."

The man of fashion laughed. "Ah, my dear Conyers, excuse me," he said, "you are terribly romantic yourself ; but be assured ladies do not die of disappointed affection now-a-days. You may be very amiable, but a well filled purse is more so. Were I in your position I should certainly turn the whole affair over to my lawyer. But do as you please."

Edmund Conyers did do as he pleased, which was to follow the heartless advice he had received in all points save one, that of communicating with Magdalen through a solicitor. He wished in some degree to soften the blow, and his friend had wounded his vanity by saying that he would be less valued than money. Edmund Conyers was flattered by the very love which he meant to trample on.

Nothing, therefore, could have been more unfortunate for Magdalen than her allusion to the probable change in her lover's worldly position ; it reminded him of the absolute

necessity of ending his connexion with her, of taking Ellinor Musgrave for his wife.

With a savage fury, therefore, of which he would not, perhaps, have been guilty had he not before his ride to Hendon indulged more freely in wine than was his wont, he exclaimed, "You do well, madam, well and wisely, to remind me of the chance of ruin which, as I but now said, would probably never have occurred, but for my folly on your account. But understand clearly, if I could ever have kept a promise which common sense and all experience should have shown you that no man ever does keep, it would scarce be in the teeth of utter ruin, from which my abiding by the engagement which you well know has always subsisted with Miss Musgrave will protect me."

"Miss Musgrave, Edmund!" ejaculated the unfortunate Magdalen; "but she does not love you,—you do not love her?"

"Faith, no, madam," replied Mr. Conyers, with a bitter laugh, "she does not love me; and judging by the annoyance which your mighty love has occasioned me, I do not desire that she should."

Magdalen rose from her supplicating posture; her face was still lividly pale, but not a tear dimmed her eye; her voice was firm and unshaken as she said, "I am to understand, then, that you will marry Miss Musgrave, and that as a consequence we must part?"

The irritation of Edmund was soothed by the quietness of her manner, for he had expected what he called "a scene," so he endeavoured in his way to soften his late remarks.

"It is so, indeed. You see, my poor Magdalen," he said, "that the matter is inevitable. Forgive me, if I have used

harsh words ;—indeed, I am well nigh distracted. Love Ellinor, of course, I do not, but I must have her fortune ; and you, Magdalen, shall be well provided for, be sure of that.”

“ Out of Miss Musgrave’s fortune ?” demanded Magdalen, and the tone she used was so very equable, that Edmund could not perceive whether she spoke derisively or not.

“ Pshaw !” he said, impatiently, “ it matters not how, or through what source, if you are provided for, Magdalen ; and be assured that you shall be—the woman I have loved should never know want.”

“ The woman you *have* loved !” exclaimed Magdalen, in a sorrowful tone.

“ Well, then, the woman I *do* love, and from whom adverse circumstances separate me, if that pleases you better,” returned Mr. Conyers, taking her hand with an air of tenderness. She did not withdraw it, but stooping down she kissed his forehead, and said softly, “ For this evil then, Edmund, there is no remedy—it must be borne.”

“ Alas, my dear Magdalen, it must ; I see no way to avoid it,” answered Edmund.

“ And the evils we must bear were better encountered patiently, is it not so ?” said Magdalen, with a laugh that sounded strangely in contrast with her late emotion. “ You shall see, Edward, how good, how patient I will be !” and again kissing him, she left the room.

Edmund Conyers seated himself by the fire, heartily rejoicing that a disagreeable affair was likely to be so quietly got over, but rather wondering at it too.

Presently, he heard the outer-door close, but he thought nothing of that, supposing that one of the servants had gone out. He observed, however, how loud the wind blew, and how strongly the rain beat against the window. When half

an hour had elapsed, however, and Magdalen did not appear, he went up stairs to seek her. She was not in her bed-room, but on the dressing-table lay a small parcel directed to him. With something like trepidation he opened it; it contained only the keys of Magdalen's drawers, of her wardrobe, of her writing desk ; not a line, not a word.

Perhaps even Edmund Conyers' fashionable friend might have been somewhat startled ; as for Edmund, he turned faint, like a woman, for the form of the unhappy Magdalen drawn from the suffocating waters, or with the fair face darkened and convulsed with poison, rose before his eyes. The sickening sensation of horror in a few minutes passed away, and then furiously Edmund demanded of his servants whether they had seen their mistress. The house was searched—she was not to be found. Then Mr. Conyers sent them out in pursuit of her, and in spite of the inclement weather, hastened down to the village himself. The most he learned on that night was, that at what must have been about a quarter of an hour after he heard the door close, Mrs. Rush-ton, as Magdalen was called in the neighbourhood, had taken the coach for London. Before the morning, Edmund had ransacked every drawer and repository in the house ;—all the clothes, all the jewels he had given to Magdalen were untouched ; even the money which he had placed in her hands a day or two before for the expenses of the ensuing week,—but not a line, not a word of farewell.

CHAPTER XXII.

“Thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing ;
A man, that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks.”

HAMLET.

THE three months which had passed so wearily with Magdalen Rushton, had not brought better fortune to Aubrey and his sister. How much of bitterness had the proud spirit of Aubrey Conyers been doomed to taste in that period. He had been brought to a court-martial, and broke for striking his superior officer. The court, it is true, considering the provocation he had received, and the gross language the colonel had used with respect to Adela, to which the pastry-cook was a witness, had strongly recommended him for another regiment : but Aubrey had been unable hitherto to procure an appointment ; the influence and the money of both Lord Allerdale and Colonel Colman were employed against him. Thus the loss even of his poor pay plunged him with his family into a deeper distress than they had yet known. Meantime his claim to the peerage of Allerdale was fairly before a committee of the House. Mr. Neville was in France, collecting the remaining documents necessary to establish it ;—his last letter mentioned that he was about to set out for Toulouse, in a church of which town he had discovered that Emilie de Boisjolin and the great grandfather of Aubrey

were married ; he expressed his conviction that he should establish the claim. In the meantime, Aubrey and his family were in the deepest, the most humiliating distress ; never was there a more perfect illustration of the adage, "that while the grass grows, the steed starves."

The whole expenses attendant on the suit, Mr. Neville had taken upon himself. Had he known the extreme suffering to which Aubrey and his mother and sister were reduced, he would have done more, but they would have died rather than he should have known it. The only alleviation which their poverty had known was in the apparently untiring kindness of the man Maitland, whom Aubrey had rescued from the attack of the hirelings of Mr. Benedict, and who, seeing an account of the duel in the papers, had visited Aubrey at his lodgings in Cecil-street. His means, however, were evidently very small, and the Conyers family had reason to fear that he had absolutely distressed himself to assist them. Under circumstances so peculiar as these, Aubrey had not suffered an over-strained feeling of pride to prevent his appealing to the friendship of Mr. Featherstonhaugh ; but most unfortunately for him, that gentleman had, he found, been compelled to accompany an invalid sister to Lisbon. This eternal struggle, meanwhile, for the bare means of existence, quite wore down Mrs. Conyers, for all the sources of support now open were Adela's pupils, and the little which Aubrey could himself obtain by giving lessons in the classics and in drawing. Worse, too, than even that terrible struggle to live, was the annoyance that Aubrey and his unfortunate family encountered from the few persons to whom they owed any money. Among these, the only serious debt was one which had been contracted by his deceased father, and which a sentiment of filial respect had compelled him to keep paid up

at any cost to himself, for this debt was so large, having been the result of an unfortunate business speculation, that Aubrey could arrange only to pay it by instalments, which, since the loss of his commission, had fallen into arrears. The man to whom the money was owing, and whom a principle of somewhat romantic honour had induced Aubrey to pay, was a hard unfeeling person, and when dire distress compelled the young man to suspend the instalments, he did not remember that he had no moral right whatever to extort the money from Aubrey, but only that the latter had been weak enough to endow him with a legal one, becoming so peremptory even before Aubrey quitted his lodgings in Cecil-street, that by the advice of Mrs. Windsor, when he joined his mother and sister at her house, he determined that, till happier times arrived, he would endeavour to elude his harsh creditor, and therefore did not let him know the present place of his abode.

As before observed, Aubrey managed to eke out the scanty subsistence earned by his sister, by himself giving lessons in drawing, and as Adela had again obtained pupils at Clapham, she procured some for her brother in the same vicinity. The days, however, on which she visited Clapham were not the same as those of Aubrey's engagement ; so that she was sitting one afternoon with Charlotte Windsor, in a very melancholy mood, watching the feverish slumbers of her mother, who was somewhat worse, when a loud double knock broke the sleep of the invalid ; and presently Mrs. Windsor, with a flurried manner, and a face beaming with honest hopes, came hurrying up stairs, to say that a gentleman was waiting to see Miss Adela, in the parlour. "He is quite a gentleman, Miss," said the excellent woman, "and when I asked him his name, he smiled and said, Oh, he would tell that to Miss

Conyers ; but you may depend upon it he brings you some good news !”

Poor Adela was not so sanguine as Mrs. Windsor, but she, even with her sad experiences, knew not yet how vile a thing the world is, and hastened to the parlour, rather with the expectation that the person waiting there was one of her brother’s Cumberland friends, than with any brighter hope.

Mrs. Windsor had not exaggerated in her favourable report. A tall and gentlemanly man rose on Adela’s entrance, and politely bowing, handed her a seat.

Adela felt some embarrassment, and inquired the name as well as business of the gentleman ; who, again bowing with that polite air, replied in the softest and most insinuating voice, “Dare I ask you, Miss Conyers, to excuse a direct answer to so simple and reasonable a question ? but the fact is, Miss Conyers, I have the honour to be employed in an affair of most extreme delicacy, by a person of the highest rank, a person of the most refined sensibility, of princely generosity, and whose modesty being equal to his other admirable qualities, will always do good by stealth.”

The speaker paused, and Adela, wondering to what this strange exordium would lead, and what she could have to do with this wonderful unknown, simply bent her head in token of attention.

“Now, Miss Conyers,” pursued the stranger, “begins the difficulty of my task. I am forbidden to mention the name of my employer, and in this interview, even my own, and yet I must venture to speak of affairs painfully important to you—nay, perhaps ask some questions respecting them. Dare I presume, Miss Conyers, to pursue this subject further ?”

"You can ask what questions you please, sir," said Adela, unable to repress a slight smile ; "you will allow me the option to answer them."

"When the matter of a conversation is delicate, perhaps unpleasant," returned the stranger, "it is perhaps better to speak bluntly to the purpose at once. Thus, Miss Conyers, it is known to my noble patron that your brother, Mr. Aubrey Conyers, claims the lordship and estates of Allerdale."

"There are few persons, sir, who are not aware of a fact that has been blazoned in the newspapers," replied Adela.

"Very few indeed," returned the stranger ; "but," and here his tone was even softer, his manner, if possible, fuller of deference, sympathy, and respect, "but unfortunately, Miss Conyers, there are many persons who do not know the full extent to which your gallant brother has been injured by the machinations of the present possessor of the titles and estates he claims, many persons who do not know what I and my noble patron know, that in league with Colonel Colman, Lord Allerdale has prevented your brother obtaining a commission in another regiment, and exults in the thought that not only his feelings as an officer and a gentleman are thus wounded, but that the loss even of the proceeds of the commission are, to Mr. Conyers and his family, a source of serious pecuniary difficulty."

The colour rose high on the pale cheek of Adela, for her pride was scarce inferior to that of her brother.

"You did well, sir," she said, "to inform me that the subject of your conversation would be painful ; I must tell you that I find it so."

"I apprehended that remark, Miss Conyers," said the stranger, "nor do I blame you for it, but hear me yet a

moment longer, and I trust to prove that I approached not so unpleasant a topic from a motive of mere impertinent curiosity."

"I cannot conceive, sir," replied Adela, "what any person can have to do with my brother's private affairs, or with his embarrassments."

"Not even if they would meddle with them only to release him from annoyance—to place him at once in a position more becoming to his merit," said the stranger, "and that in a manner so delicate that not even your most sensitive feelings should be wounded?"

"Such a friend would indeed be worth much to us at the present time," answered Adela, adding, as her eye glanced over the small and shabbily furnished parlour, "for I shall not stain my lips, sir, with an untruth so gross as to say that we are not deeply distressed; you must be quite aware that if we were not we should not be living here."

"Surely not, Miss Conyers," answered the stranger; "and your mother, too, I believe is ill?"

"She is, indeed, sir—sadly, sadly ill," said Adela; "if a change of circumstances come not soon, it will come too late I fear to benefit her in this world."

"And my patron has heard, too, that you have no means of existing whatever?" said the stranger.

"There, sir, of course," replied Adela, "his own sense must have told him, that he was in some shape misinformed; it is not in London that people can live upon air. We have subsisted lately upon what I and my brother have earned at teaching; we shame at no honourable exertions."

"Nobly spoken, and worthy of the sister of your brother!" exclaimed the stranger. "But, to be plain with you, Miss Conyers, there is something so romantic in the present

position of your brother, that you must be neither surprised nor offended to find that he and his affairs are topics of much conversation. As I told you at first, I have intruded on you by the desire of an illustrious person, who promises himself the highest pleasure in being of assistance to your brother ; but it is necessary that I should see Mr. Conyers himself. May I ask whether he resides with you ?”

“He sees my mother occasionally,” said Adela, for the first time in her life condescending to something like an equivocation ; for, despite the exceeding politeness of the stranger’s manner, there was about him an indescribable something which prevented Adela giving him anything like an entire confidence ; and though she had no thought of any positive evil resulting from such a communication, she avoided telling the stranger that Aubrey resided in that house.

“And when your brother comes here, is there any chance that I could see him ?” inquired the stranger.

“It is but a chance, sir,” answered Adela, “but when he does visit my mother, it is generally towards the evening, and you might possibly meet him then.”

“I shall endeavour to do so,” said the stranger, rising ; “and now, when I take my leave, let me implore you, Miss Conyers, to suspend your judgment of me. I know that many of my questions must have appeared to you misplaced and impertinent ; and again I must say, judge not of me yet, be assured that time will show that my visit was not one of mere idle curiosity.”

With these words the stranger took his leave, and Adela hastening up stairs, detailed to her anxious mother the conversation which she had had, and the promises which had been made to her. Poor Mrs. Conyers, though very amiable,

was also very weak, and upon the relation of Adela, she commenced luxuriating on the most splendid day-dreams ; Adela was not so sanguine, but her mother determined that this wonderful stranger could be nothing less than a duke in disguise, who was prepared to assist Aubrey out of love for his sister. Adela could not refrain from laughing at this idea, at which, like an invalid as she was, Mrs. Conyers grew rather pettish ; but in fact, this stranger, this lover, this nobleman in disguise, did not, as he had himself said, make his visit out of mere curiosity, being no other than Mr. Nicholas Benedict ! Disguised, indeed, for what disguise could surpass his assumption of the character of a kind-hearted and honest man !

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Go, Tubal, fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight before."

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

It requires a very long course of misfortune to make us fully acquainted with the various forms of human villany: there is nothing like poverty, as a touchstone of all that the heart of man contains of good or bad: and this poverty, too, must be of some continuance, and encountered by those who have once known comfort, if not affluence; then will they find that some of their friends, so called when they had at command a good house and a good table, will audaciously shake off their acquaintance at once, avowing in all but direct words that it was to the aforesaid house and table *their* civilities were addressed. Others again, more humane or more cunning, remembering that the sky is not always clouded, preserve for some time the appearance of courtesy and attention, which, however, gradually cool down, should the distress of the friend long continue, and at last cease altogether; while still fewer are those who will tender real assistance whether of interest or money.

The fallacious hopes, too, the brilliant prospects which at times mock almost every distressed person, form not the least portion of their sufferings; and their hopes, as was destined to be the case with the Conyers' family and Mr. Benedict, are oftenest awakened by the wretches who contemplate inflicting on them some new and deadly wrong.

It would have required for Aubrey and his family to have been as wicked as the lawyer himself, to contemplate any possible evil at the hands of a person who had presented himself under such a pretext as that which he had employed; and a thought of the brutal creditor of his father, to whom Aubrey was bound, never entered their minds.

Aubrey was sensible, too, that his suit against Lord Allerdale and the affair of the court-martial had excited some public interest, and in the frankness and generosity of his own heart it seemed not to him a very romantic act for a person of rank to tender him pecuniary aid, since it was what he would have done himself, had he been high in wealth and prosperity, and another person circumstanced as he was.

According, therefore, to the wish of Adela and his mother, he took care to keep in the way at Mrs. Windsor's, about the time that Mr. Benedict had said that he would call. Unfortunately, in speaking of her visitor, Adela had not in any way described his person, saying only that he was a gentlemanly man, which indeed Mr. Benedict could be when it suited his purpose. Thus the poor family, quite unsuspecting of the blow that was in preparation for them, were the whole day nursing themselves with the hope that they were about to receive aid which would greatly mitigate their trials.

Mrs. Conyers was somewhat worse on that evening, for the excitement even of hope operated unfavourably on her weak nerves, and both Adela and Aubrey were sitting with her when Mrs. Windsor came up to say that a person had called from the gentleman who had been there the night before. Aubrey immediately hastened down stairs; in the parlour there was awaiting him a somewhat dapper-looking young man, with whose person he was unacquainted. The young man

smirked and bowed, and asked if he had not the honour of speaking to Mr. Aubrey Conyers; Aubrey did not like his manner, but of course replied in the affirmative.

"Then, sir," said the stranger, smirking and bowing again, as he presented Aubrey with a paper, "it is my duty to serve you with a writ for money due from you to Mr. John Jones!"

The surprise, the shock at the moment, were so great, that Aubrey lost his self-command, and turning deadly pale, he said, as he took the paper, which it was useless to refuse, "This is a most extraordinary proceeding, and a piece of unnecessary malice on the part of Mr. Jones, who might, I think, remember, that but for what I must now call my folly in giving him a written promise that I would pay the money which he claimed from my poor father, he could not have sued me for this debt, which in fact is not my own."

"Very sorry indeed, sir!" said the lawyer's clerk, for such was Aubrey's visitant; "very foolish of you to undertake the debt; pay what the law compels you to pay in this world, look to your own debts, that's enough for most men, and too much into the bargain for many; but you see, sir, this debt to Mr. Jones is now your own, and he will have his money. Our house though, Messrs. Catchem and Grab, have no wish to be hard, sir; they have no wish to be hard; the sum total of the debt remaining is sixty-seven pounds, but if, during the seven days' grace which you are allowed, you pay the ten pound instalment due to Mr. Jones, and the cost of the writ, and the expenses of Messrs. Catchem and Grab, why, then, sir, the proceedings will be stayed."

Aubrey felt that he could not complain to the lawyer's clerk of this proposal, which was fair enough on the part of the house; he had, indeed, nothing to complain of, but his own

adverse circumstances, and the exceeding malice of the man Jones. To pay the sum demanded was, however, to his slender hopes, as impossible as if it had been a thousand pounds; in the confusion of mind which the presentation of that detestable document occasioned him, he forgot for a moment the visit of the preceding evening, but in remembering it, there came the conviction that it was one of the most cruel frauds ever practised on misfortune; and it was with some sternness that he spoke to the clerk of the baseness of the trick, and demanded whether it would be inconsistent with his duty to let him, Aubrey, know who was the person who had practised it.

"Indeed, sir!" answered the clerk, "I have received no orders not to tell you who was the person that called upon your sister last night. It was Mr. Nicholas Benedict, who with great trouble traced out your abode, and who gave information of it to Mr. Jones."

"Such a manoeuvre was worthy of such a villain!" said Aubrey with indignation.

"Hard words, sir!" said the lawyer's clerk; "almost indictable; but debtors will say angry things, and I am not fond of being so ill-natured as to report them, at least when they are not said of any member of our firm; a clever man, though, is Mr. Benedict—a man of great ability."

The lawyer's clerk paused, as if he expected Aubrey to tender his praises also of Mr. Benedict's talents, but as he paid them no other tribute than a malediction, which was loud and deep too, he went on to express a hope that he, Aubrey, would be ready to meet the demand of Mr. Jones; which, in the very irritation even of the moment, Aubrey declared there was little likelihood he should be able to do.

"Great pity that will be, sir," said the clerk; "expenses

will accumulate ; law must take its course ; hope, for your own sake, you will exert yourself ; surely such a gentleman must have friends, who will not suffer him to be inconvenienced for so paltry an amount." With these phrases, the lawyer's clerk, who was after all by no means the worst of his class, and had avoided executing his duty with the customary brutality, bowed himself out, and left Aubrey, and his mother and sister, with their kind-hearted landlady, to consider how the money was to be raised, and to exclaim against the hypocrisy of Mr. Benedict, and the savage avarice of Mr. Jones.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“Prosperity brings friends, and adversity tries them.”

PROVERB.

No old woman's saying truer than the above; it is and has been true in all ages and countries. The great bulk of man and woman-kind will fawn upon and cringe to the prosperous, even without expecting from them any profit;—it is the abstract of prosperity that they adore. As for friends, we should indeed, like Sue's blind beggar, like to see one, and we would have him or her stuffed and put in a glass case, as the most wonderful of all curiosities. Friends are the same in old times and new; they were the same at Athens and Rome as in London and Paris; they were the same in the days of Haroun in the most romantic city of Bagdad; witness the trials of Noureddin, who spent the whole of his fortune upon friends, and of Abon Hassan, who wisely retained a portion of his substance for himself, and tested the quality of friends with the remainder.

The situation of Aubrey was now so trying, that he even went the length of addressing for the loan of a little money some of the people whom he had known when he was the supposed heir of General St. Leger, but he fared very much in the fashion of Noureddin; one gentleman was ill, another gone into the country, another had been just called upon himself to pay an unfortunate tradesman; they none of them

away ; there is no harm to your innocence in speaking with her ; and you are not angry with me, I hope, that I let her in ?”

“ I should be angry with you if you had refused so simple a request,” returned Adela, as she hastened down stairs, having requested Mrs. Windsor to sit with her mother till her return, for Charlotte was out.

Poor Magdalen, pale and altered indeed, rose up on Adela’s entrance, and stood with downcast eyes trembling like a culprit. With the usual salutations of friends on meeting, Adela took her hand, which she had not ventured to offer, and expressed her regret at seeing her look so ill. The tenderness of her tone, of her action, quite overcame the firmness of the unhappy Magdalen, and pressing that friendly hand to her heart, to her lips, she wept bitterly.

“ Oh Miss Conyers !” she said, when she could command her voice to speak, “ I know not what excuse to offer for intruding myself on your presence ; I had not ventured to do so, but that Mrs. Windsor told me your brother was not at home, for him I could not bear to see. Oh, it is bitter for a lost and miserable creature like myself to stand so humbled, so unworthy of her notice in the presence of a woman of spotless fame ; but women’s hearts are tender, and the purest are the most compassionate, and you I may hope will forget your scorn of my sin, in your pity for my suffering. But men, even the noblest, the most generous, have more sense of justice, and less of feeling. Your brother would despise me ; I could not endure his presence ; he would not excuse the folly that made me the dupe of one so inferior to himself as Edmund Conyers. But you, Miss Adela, you know from your inmost heart, what all women know, that we do not

always love men because they are worthy of our love, but because it is our instinct, our destiny to love them; and thus it has been with me and Edmund Conyers. I have so much vanity left in my degradation, that I will tell you, Miss Conyers, I knew from the very first, that the mind, the soul of Edmund was inferior to my own, but I did not love him the less for that. I have seen many handsomer men, too, than he, as his own brother or yours; it was not, therefore, merely for his personal attractions that I loved him,—no, *I loved him because I loved him*, and I was the more infatuated in my love because it had in it no reason, no ostensible excuse for its infatuation. But it is at an end now; that dream I indulged in, when I thought that Edmund Conyers loved me too, for he and I will meet no more.”

“No more!” ejaculated Adela, shocked by the look and accent of despair with which the last words were uttered.

“No more, Miss Conyers,” said Magdalen; “I should not otherwise have dared intrude myself again upon your presence. No; I venture to seek this last interview with you only upon the plea—the excuse—that I and Edmund Conyers have broken our unholy bonds.”

“And shall I, too, see you no more?” said Adela, in a sorrowful voice. “Alas! what do you propose? where are you going? into the country, or abroad?”

“I am going a long, long journey, Miss Conyers,” replied Magdalen; “so long and terrible a journey, that I would fain have your good wishes and prayers before it begins.”

“But where is it, then, you are going?” said Adela.

“Nay, I know not myself, the precise limit of my destination,” answered Magdalen.

“But have you money? are you provided with the means

to travel so far?" inquired Adela. "Surely, surely, Mr. Conyers has not been so base as to leave you without provision?"

"No, indeed, dear young lady, he has not," answered Magdalen; "but I am well provided for; and I would not take his alms when his love had ceased; and indeed so well am I provided for all that I shall ever want, that one reason for my boldness in thus intruding upon you was to offer to you this poor token of my affection, my respect!"

As Magdalen spoke she drew from her finger a diamond of great value, and offered it to Adela. Adela drew back.

"I cannot take that!" she said; "something of less value, as a remembrance, I will gladly receive."

"Indeed, Miss Conyers," returned Magdalen, "I shall think that you still resent my intrusion, if you refuse to accept the ring: I do not ask you to retain it; sell it,—dispose of it any way you please; and be assured of this, I have even yet left that sense of propriety that I would not offer it to you, had it been the gift of Edmund Conyers. It was presented to me after the death of my mother, by a lady with whom I went to reside as a companion; and who, to my sorrow and loss, herself died soon afterwards."

"Still," urged Adela, "I should not feel justified in accepting it; the money it would produce may be of use to yourself."

"I do not want it, Miss Conyers," replied Magdalen. "I am well provided for the journey I am about to undertake and I will venture even to tell you that I had a hope, in offering you this ring, that you might raise money upon it to release you from what I know are your present embarrassments. For I will tell you, I had yesterday an inter-

view with that villanous lawyer, Benedict, who traced me to the lodging I had taken for myself after I had parted with Edmund ; and he boasted of how he had found out your abode also, and incited a greedy and cruel creditor to harass your brother. And after the man had gone, Miss Conyers, whose presence to me is like that of some loathsome reptile, one sweet thought rose up to console me amid my exceeding misery—the thought that I might again have the happiness of being useful to you, as it had pleased Heaven that I once before was useful : and now you, dearest, sweet Miss Conyers, will not, I hope, refuse this, my last prayer—my last consolation !”

“But your own prospects, Mrs. Rushton,” said Adela ; “before I accept from you an article so valuable, may I venture to ask something of your own resources ? Mr. Conyers may have been liberal—it would be but a slight compensation for his injustice towards you ; but my brother has heard that he is deeply embarrassed—it may not be in his power to fulfil the engagements he may make.”

“I seek nothing, I have accepted nothing, Miss Adela, from Edmund Conyers,” replied Magdalen, proudly raising up her beautiful head ; the tears gushed from her eyes, as she added in a broken tone, “No, my love was not to be bought and sold—and he knows that now.”

“Then you have other resources ?” said Adela.

“I have, Miss Conyers,” replied Magdalen ; “and let me add, that they are honourable—if a creature so unhappy as myself may dare to mention honour’s sacred name.”

“Alas, Mrs. Rushton,” said Adela, herself unable to refrain from tears, “you pain me by the severity of your self-reproaches ; surely your imprudence was not without excuse ?”

“Indeed, Miss Conyers,” returned Magdalen, “I cannot

lay that unction to my soul, to say that my folly—my guilt—had an excuse. The faults of woman, Miss Conyers, are never to be excused. As for myself, at six-and-twenty years of age, I could not plead the credulity of extreme youth; and if I had been but sixteen, neither would I allow that as an excuse—for a mere girl should be too innocent, too pure, to think of love or lovers."

"You are hard upon our sex, and on yourself," said Adela.

"I am, indeed," replied Magdalen, "for bitter experience has made me so. But I have no wish to burden you, Miss Conyers, with the pangs of a sorrow I have well deserved; but you will not, you will not deny to me, in my misery, the consolation of believing that I have again been useful to you?"

Thus entreated, Adela had not the heart to refuse the gift of the poor penitent, on which indeed she felt that she might raise a sum sufficient to disembarass her brother from the present pressing claim.

When, however, she finally agreed to retain the ring, an indifferent observer might have imagined that Magdalen was the party obliged. With a few words more she took her farewell, declining the offer of Adela to see Mrs. Conyers.

"No, dear and sweet friend," she said, "I know too well with what severity your mother must regard me, again to obtrude myself on her presence."

Before she left the house of Mrs. Windsor, too, Magdalen informed Adela that she had understood from Benedict that Edmund Conyers was about to leave town in a few days, to celebrate his nuptials with Ellinor Musgrave. "The young lady, however, does not love him," said Magdalen, "nor does

he love her; and, mark me, Miss Conyers, that marriage will never take place."

It was on the threshold of Mrs. Windsor's house, in the very moment of her leave-taking, that Magdalen Rushton uttered those words, the last that Adela ever heard fall from her lips.

CHAPTER XXV.

“Peace to thy broken heart and virgin grave.
Oh happy thou of life to lose the worst.
That grief though deep, though fatal was the first.
Thrice happy ne’er to feel nor fear the force
Of absence, shame, pride, hate, revenge, remorse.”

BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

THE present of the diamond ring from Magdalen Rushton, which Aubrey could not, under all the circumstances, condemn his sister for accepting, enabled them to raise money enough, as a loan, to meet their existing exigencies and satisfy the demand made by their hard creditor, Mr. Jones. When that was done, however, they were again reduced almost to their last shilling, and they lived as those only live who rise each morning unknowing how the wants of the day are to be supplied, and marvelling how they were supplied at all at its conclusion.

Mrs. Conyers, however, was growing better, and one dull afternoon, the three, Aubrey, his mother, and sister, were still loitering over the tea that was to make amends for the want of a dinner, when the postman was heard at the door, and little Harry Windsor came running up stairs with a letter for Aubrey. It was from Mr. Musgrave, imploring his immediate presence at Ravenglas, and considerably enclosing a twenty pound note for the expenses of the

journey. Peculiarly circumstanced as he was with both Mr. Musgrave and his niece, and aware also how heavily the estates were mortgaged, Aubrey would have endured the tortures of an Indian at the stake sooner than he would have applied to them for aid, which was, however, none the less acceptable when so generously volunteered. The whole of the twenty pounds were not of course required for Aubrey's journey, and he was seated with his family and the Windsors at the little supper which was the first comfortable meal they had known for some time, when Mr. Maitland unexpectedly made his appearance. He seemed in high spirits, and on Aubrey mentioning his proposed visit to Ravensglas, he exclaimed that nothing could be more fortunate, as he was about on the morrow to set out for Cumberland himself, and had indeed called to request Aubrey's company on the journey.

So it was settled that they should travel together, and by the first train on the following morning they left London. The failing spirits of the Conyers family had been roused by the letter from Mr. Musgrave, but more trying scenes were passing at Ravensglas than they for a moment imagined; scenes which alike tested the endurance of Richard Musgrave and the generosity of his niece, for the alternative proposed was the immediate marriage of Ellinor with Edmund, or the immediate foreclosure of the mortgage; and threatened as he was with the loss of his paternal estates, Edmund had none of the generosity which would have made him turn a deaf ear to the revelations which his father now deemed it proper to make to him, as to the advantages he would derive, mortgaged though Ravensglas was, from an union with its heiress.

Edmund Conyers had, therefore, as Magdalen had told

Adela, left London for Cumberland: he knew not that his betrayed and revengeful mistress was following on his steps; and his conscience, by no means too sensitive, was satisfied by the offer he had made her through Benedict, and which, as she had told Adela, she had refused.

On the day when Mr. Musgrave's letter arrived in London, Ellinor encountered a mournful scene indeed; she had been summoned to the house of the curate at an early hour in the morning, for his eldest and best beloved child, her own sweet friend, the once fair and happy Rose, was dying. The physician, who could not "minister to a mind diseased," had called the complaint of Rose a rapid consumption, the effect of a severe cold, but Ellinor knew better, and an impulse of indignation which she could not control made her cheek burn and her eye sparkle when the servant girl who, with the assistance of poor Rose, had attended to the curate's motherless younger children, said that Mr. Francis Conyers was below, and wished to speak with Miss Musgrave. Ellinor was alone with her friend, for the curate had been summoned away from the death-bed of his own child, to christen the heir of a rich man, who had summoned a gay party for the joyful occasion, and whose residence was five miles off.

Poor Rose was propped on pillows, breathing very faintly and with difficulty, but she observed the colour rise on Ellinor's cheek, and clasping her thin hands she said in an imploring accent, "Dear Ellinor, be not angry, speak to him mildly for my sake; he is not so much to blame. How weak and foolish was I, to think that he could marry me! alas, people in his class are not at their own disposal; if he had so much offended his father, how could I ever have endured to see him, who was born to rank and riches, suffer the poverty which we must have encountered together?"

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“Yet you would have endured anything for his sake, my poor Rose,” said Ellinor, stooping and kissing her damp forehead; “but be satisfied, I will spare him for your sake—I would not for his own!”

With these words Ellinor left the chamber, and descended to the little parlour below where Francis was awaiting her. The reserved supercilious manner, mingled with an overstrained politeness, which had always made Francis Conyers so disagreeable to Ellinor, somewhat failed him on the present occasion, and it was with considerable perturbation that he said, “This is a most painful affair, Miss Musgrave, a trial which I would fain avoid; poor, sweet Rose, if my seeing her would save her a moment’s suffering, though it were at the cost of years of anguish to myself, I would not hesitate, but alas, an interview can only revive for both of us the recollection of happy dreams that have brought miserable results, while the agitation of our meeting may perhaps prematurely destroy her, and its remembrance will haunt me like a spectre through my life.”

“You have heard that it is the wish of Rose, her last wish, to see you,” replied Ellinor, coldly. “Surely the penalty of witnessing her condition is not too severe a punishment for the thoughtlessness, should I not rather say, the heartlessness, that caused it!”

“You are unjust, Ellinor, like all your sex, upon these subjects!” said Francis; “men who have to struggle with the world cannot sacrifice a whole life to the dreams of youthful passion.”

“Upon that principle,” retorted Ellinor, “they might then in compassion spare the weakness of woman, whose romantic susceptibility prevents her mistrusting them, and who, ready to make sacrifices for the man she loves, is vain

enough to expect some sacrifice in return. But we waste time, which is not long for poor Rose, and I own, Mr. Francis, I am as unwilling to spare you such pain as you may endure on this sad interview, as to deny my poor friend the last comfort she may know on earth."

Such bitterness of speech was not common with Ellinor Musgrave, but Francis took the reproof in silence; he knew that he had well deserved it, that as a mere pastime he had won the affections of the curate's daughter, that he had felt for her as much of love as it was in his nature to feel, and that after indirectly, at least, leading the poor girl to suppose that she would be his wife, he was now the affianced husband of a woman whom he hated and despised, and to whom he had sold himself for her wealth.

A bright smile lighted up the pale features of poor Rose as her faithless lover entered her room, and she stretched out her hands eagerly towards him; the hypocritical sentimentality of Francis, for the first and last time in his life, then failed him, and sinking on his knees beside the bed he bathed with genuine tears of sorrow and contrition the poor pale hand he held.

"Do not weep so, dear! but look up at me, let me look you in the face once more;" as she spoke, with her other wasted hand she parted the locks from her lover's brow. He did look up at her, and then the callous man of the world moaned in his agony.

"I am a wretch!" he said, "ever unworthy of your love, sweet Rose; a base false hypocrite, who beguiled you but for pastime of your best affections!"

"Nay, dearest, you blame yourself too much," said Rose. "Do I not know how stern your father is, and that you must have the means to support your station? I have told

my father that I never blamed you, and I have not blamed you, no never, never, never !”

Faint and fainter grew the sweet voice as it pronounced these last fond forgiving words, till it sunk into a low musical chime, and the pure eyes closed, and the clasp of the small chill hand grew lax. At that moment the door gently opened, and the poor curate, who had hurried home from the discordant scene of gaiety, glided to the bedside of his dying child, and taking the other little hand in his, he said in a broken voice, “Oh, look up once, my dear Rose, my sweet child—only a look, a word, for your poor father at the last !”

Slowly and painfully, as it seemed, the lids rose from the azure eyes, over which a ghastly film had gathered; there was a faint gurgling in the throat, and she evidently spoke with difficulty. “Dear father—bless you—in heaven we shall meet again; I have forgiven—oh, for my sake forgive, forgive —— !”

Again the voice sunk into that low musical murmur, but never passed a sound from those lips again. The bereaved father remained kneeling in prayer and in anguish beside the beautiful corpse of his child, and Ellinor, leaning over the bed, reverently kissed the cold brow, and closed the dull fixed eyes; while *he*, the basest of deceivers, who had deceived not from passion but the impulse of a wretched vanity, and in whose behalf had been breathed only words of forgiveness and peace, conscience-stricken, debased, and miserable, rose from beside the dead girl, and crept from the house with the gathering shadow of the night into the darkness which best suited his own guilty, self-accusing thoughts.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“And oh, that pang where more than madness lies,
The worm that will not sleep and never dies ;
Thought of the gloomy day and ghastly night,
That dreads the darkness and yet loathes the light,
That winds around, and tears the quivering heart ;
Ah, wherefore not consume it and depart.”

BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

AUBREY CONYERS and his new friend Maitland pursued their journey to the north without any occurrence worthy of record ; as they approached their destination, however, Aubrey fancied that he observed a kind of gloom settle over his companion, which strongly contrasted with manners usually reckless and daring, even to effrontery. The train having conveyed them to Carlisle, they took a post-chaise to the town of A——, within six miles of Allerdale, where Maitland intimated that they must for a time part company. At the chief inn of this town they took refreshments, and it was on their arrival there that the uneasiness of Maitland visibly increased. He had all the air and manners of one who seeks, perhaps unavailingly, to “bend up each corporal agent to some terrible feat.” He took his share of the repast rather as one who feels that he must not suffer his physical energies to flag, than as if he had any appetite for the meal ; and though generally, as Aubrey had before remarked, a somewhat free drinker, he drank on this occasion but a couple of glasses of wine.

It was late in the day when they reached A——, but Aubrey being resolved to proceed the same night to Ravensglas, had ordered the chaise to wait. He had understood from Maitland that he had some business to transact in the neighbourhood, but was not, of course, aware of its nature; he apprehended, however, that it was unpleasant. The dinner being ended, and the waiter withdrawn, Maitland drew his chair towards the fire, and taking a sealed packet from his bosom, he placed it in the hands of Aubrey, and while the shadows gathered yet deeper on his face, he said, "Our first introduction, Lieutenant Conyers, was, you doubtless remember, marked by a great service rendered to me by yourself. I was, after such an introduction, naturally inclined to think very favourably of you, and this favourable opinion our succeeding acquaintance has thoroughly confirmed. I am not a man to fawn and flatter, nor am I placed in a position in which to flatter any person would in any way avail me; but sincerely, and from my heart, do I say, that your brave endurance of poverty, your valorous resistance of oppression, has done more to show me the weakness and wickedness of certain passages in my own life, ay, and to nerve me to the performance of an act of justice which will probably destroy me, than a thousand sermons would have done."

"It is seldom," said Aubrey, "that an act of justice ruins those who nobly venture to perform it; let me hope that no fatal consequences will attend just conduct on your part."

"We must all pay our reckoning, sooner or later," responded Maitland; "if I exacted that payment in former years, I must submit to make it now. I am going then, my friend, on a short but possibly dangerous journey; one, too, in which I must have no companion. I know not what perilous result I may encounter: if I were to trust the foreboding,

the horror, that in spite of myself creeps over me, I should say it would be fatal, but that would be perhaps a superstition, which I will at least endeavour to conquer. But it is necessary to prepare even for the worst. This packet, which I confide to your honourable keeping, will explain a dark and fearful story, a tissue of treachery and falsehood, which the world's wickedness has not surpassed, and in which, to my shame, I had too great a share. But repentance, divines tell us, cannot come too late, and the work of that repentance I shall this night begin. It may have an effect even on your fortunes which you but little imagine. You will then pursue your journey to Ravenglas to night, and return hither by noon to-morrow. You will promise this?"

"Most willingly," answered Aubrey; "but if there is such danger in the business you are about to undertake, why persist in alone encountering its dangers? Let me remain with you to-night, and I will go to Ravenglas to-morrow."

"It cannot be," returned Maitland with a sigh; "this peril must be all my own; but if my worst forebodings prove correct, and you do not find me here by noon to-morrow, then you will open this packet, and communicate its contents to Mr. Musgrave, of Ravenglas, and to the principal magistrate of this town."

"The story which the packet tells, then, concerns Mr. Musgrave?" said Aubrey, involuntarily.

"Deeply, too deeply," returned the stranger; "but you will observe, let what will pass between you and the old man to-night, and I suspect it is in connexion with the story alluded to in these papers, the one great horror and trial of his life, that he has sent for you, you will not, till you see me again, or before noon to-morrow, hint even at your having such a packet in your possession. Promise me this also."

Aubrey of course gave the required promise, and Maitland, with a strange unnatural attempt at gaiety, then said. "In a few minutes we must part, for the time at which you ordered the chaise fast approaches; and I, too, have not a moment to lose, so for those few minutes—the last, perhaps, we shall ever pass together—we will choose, if you please, some cheerful topic of discourse; your marriage, when Baron of Allerdale, with the heiress of Ravenglas—or the nuptials of your charming sister with that very clever and handsome lawyer, who is almost worthy even of her."

"I cannot jest upon either supposition," said Aubrey; "my fate, and that of Ellinor Musgrave, depends too much on worldly circumstances; and I would not wish my dearest Adela to be the portionless bride even of Horatio Neville."

"Then we will not jest, as indeed we need not," replied Maitland. "For be assured the marriages I have spoken of will take place; and then let me only say, of you and of your sister, may you be as happy as you deserve to be."

Maitland shook the hand of Aubrey warmly as he spoke; at that moment the chaise was announced. "Remember all I have said now, and be careful of the packet!" observed Maitland; and so they parted.

* * * * *

The night set in gloomily; the wild winds roared round the old towers of Ravenglas; while in the park, the topmost boughs of the gigantic beech and oak bent and cracked in the gale, which at every blast swept from them the encumbering sleet and snow. And strange ghostly noises did that wailing gust cause in and about the old manor-house, moaning through the long dusky galleries, and passing with a sigh down the wide staircases, or madly driving the sleet against the dark casements of the long-

deserted "Agnes Tower." But the wild fury of that storm, before which the stalwart peasant shrunk, and hastened home to make fast his cottage door and windows, and warm his half-frozen limbs by the blazing fire, to which the fuel could not be spared, on such a night : that wild fury of the storm seemed to contrast almost mockingly with the grave subdued aspect which misery took within the old halls of Ravenglas. There were the aged servants gliding about with pale sorrowful faces, silently—or if they spoke a word, it was in a whisper, and with a sigh—as did the old housekeeper, who, shaking her grey head, said to one of her subordinates, "Ay, ay, Margery, it is a fearsome night, and the Lord help the poor souls that are exposed to it; but there is one who has saved many a head from the pelting of a storm like this, and now they talk of driving him from his own old halls, and leaving him without a shelter for his head to-morrow!"

"But did they not say, if my young lady would marry Master Edmund, they would let the squire keep Ravenglas?" inquired Margery.

"Ay, ay, they said so," returned the housekeeper ; "and a pretty sort of marriage that would be ; my young lady hates him, and he does not care for her ; but you do not know, Margery, even if she does marry Mr. Edmund, the squire is still to give up Ravenglas, and go and live, I suppose, in some paltry cottage, that Lord Allerdale may have Ravenglas when he is turned out of the Conyers property, to which they say he has no right at all. Alas, alas ! I hope I may die the day that my dear master is turned out of Ravenglas!"

The poor old woman was overcome by the doleful pictures which her own fancy conjured up ; and leaning back in

her chair, she wept. Weeping, too, alone in her chamber, was Ellinor Musgrave ; weeping for her own gloomy fortunes ; weeping for the loss of her beloved friend, Rose ; weeping also over the strange and altered demeanour of her uncle, who, while acquiescing in her forced marriage with Edmund with a calmness that almost too severely tasked even her generosity, at the same time wrapped himself more closely than ever in the mystery of a sorrow which each day seemed to increase. Ever, though, did the proposal of his quitting Ravensglas appear to aggravate this anguish ; and when Ellinor endeavoured to soothe it, she met with a repulse so severe, so unlike the usual gentleness of her uncle towards herself, that she suffered from it less even of grief than of surprise.

Such a harsh reply had Mr. Musgrave given to her expression of astonishment that, under the existing circumstances so painful to all parties, her uncle should have sent a letter to London, desiring the presence of Aubrey Conyers at Ravensglas.

"He is the last person I would wish to meet," Ellinor ventured on that occasion with some bitterness to say.

"He is a man of honour," answered Richard Musgrave, "and to his ear, Ellinor, I can intrust matters that are unfit for yours."

"And he is to come hither—he!" said Ellinor, "to behold the preparations for my hateful marriage with Edmund. Oh, my uncle, let the sacrifice of that marriage be enough,—that marriage in which contempt, indifference, and base worldly interests hold the place of love ; but send not for Lieutenant Conyers to behold the extent of my misery. What is the grief you can confide to his ear, for which mine will not be equally compassionate?"

"Ellinor! Ellinor!" replied Musgrave, "it is Aubrey

Conyers whom I *must* see. Confide to your ear the tale I have for his? Ah, poor girl, you know not what you ask!"

And thus, the letter requiring Aubrey's presence at Ravensglas was dispatched, and on that dreary night when he arrived there, Ellinor sat pale and weeping in her chamber, trembling to hear the sound of the great bell that would announce his arrival, resolved not to see him,—for the articles for her marriage with Edmund were to be signed on the morrow, and the signing of those articles was to precede her uncle's relinquishment of his ancestral home. Why, did Ellinor ask herself again and again, since under any circumstances her uncle was compelled to abandon Ravensglas, did he still insist upon her crowning that sacrifice with the additional misery to herself of a marriage with a man whom she did not love, and who did not even pretend to love her? That was a question which increased the unhappiness of Ellinor, but which she could not answer.

The visit of Aubrey Conyers at Ravensglas occasioned as much surprise to the ancient servants as to their young mistress. Ellinor did not appear at the supper table, and it was a relief to Aubrey that she did not, for, to his utter astonishment and grief, he had been informed by Mr. Musgrave on his arrival, that the marriage with Edmund was really about to take place. But the old and faithful servants, even Ellinor herself, had lost for a time the sense of their sorrows in sleep, and the wind still wildly sobbed and moaned round the mansion, and the night was now "almost at odds with morning, which was which," yet still was Richard Musgrave sitting with his guest in the library, talking in a low, earnest tone. Very low, as well as earnest, was indeed the voice of Richard Musgrave; yet often, such was the

matter of his speech, did he cast a bewildered fearful glance around him, while his pale cheek grew paler, and he looked as though he feared the walls had ears. Very patiently too, though with a sorrowful and at times a stern countenance, did Aubrey listen to that heart-stricken suffering man; but when the fearful tale was concluded, the sorrow alone remained upon Aubrey's face, for terrible as had been the destiny of Richard Musgrave, there was much more in his conduct to pity than condemn. He paused at last,—his recital was concluded, and he bent his pale face down upon his hand, and breathed faintly, like one exhausted by the paroxysm of a physical agony. Aubrey remained silent, melted with a profound sorrow, thinking with a certain amount of self-accusation; how light had been his griefs, ay, even to the loss of Ellinor, in compare with the remorse, the self-accusations of the man before him, still, after all, more unfortunate than guilty.

Richard Musgrave, however, misconstrued the meaning of his silence; the miserable are always ready to interpret everything for the worst: and he raised his blue eyes wildly to the face of Aubrey. "And you too, Lieutenant Conyers," he said, "you even look upon my crime with a horror equal to that of Lord Allerdale; you regard me with loathing, and you will not aid me in this horrible strait?"

Aubrey rose from his seat, and took the poor cold trembling hands which Musgrave extended beseechingly towards him, within his own. His manner was that of a son to a beloved father. "Mr. Musgrave," he said, "dearest and best friend, thus let me call you,—condemn me not so much as to think that I condemn you. The anger which led to that fatal act, which has furnished you with a life's anguish,

was an anger in which you sinned not. Oh, dear venerated friend, it was not a crime that you committed, but an imprudence, an imprudence which the vile world punishes with a severity with which it does not visit crime. But oh, dear friend, had you called a moral courage to your aid, had you presented yourself before a tribunal of your country, with your unhappy sister-in-law in your hand, and spoken boldly of that which you had suffered in her behalf, of that which, exasperated by a sense of her wrongs, you had done, who would have dared condemn you? How innocent, or at least excusable in the avowal, would have been that deed, which concealment has turned into a vulture to feed upon your heart!"

"But now, now, even you, you, my beloved young friend, will acknowledge, that a revealing of that awful deed would come too late!" ejaculated Musgrave, whose weak and sensitive nerves were startled by the bold speech of Aubrey. "It is too late now, too late, and you will aid me, I know you will, to secure a final concealment; for to-morrow, alas! I must abandon the possession of these old halls; and the 'Agnes Tower,' with all its horrid secrets, will then be laid open—and you will look to those dark secrets first!"

"I will indeed examine the Agnes Tower," said Aubrey, gravely, "and I trust, Mr. Musgrave, that I shall bring from its solitary chambers a comfort you do not expect; how know you that the ghastly objects out of which the lawyer Benedict has invented the eternal incubus to torment you, really lie within those chambers? I like not the man, from the little I saw of him; and what I have heard of his professional character, justifies the worst surmises. Nor does Lord Allerdale rank higher in my opinion, for I now believe

that the ostentatious insolence of his conduct towards myself, arose from his consciousness of my better claims to the title and estates which he holds ; and the man who can in one instance practise injustice from a selfish motive is not likely to be more magnanimous in another. It was palpably the interest of Lord Allerdale and his tool Benedict to leave you under the impression that those chambers still contained the awful records of the horrors they had witnessed, which, to an unprejudiced mind, it appears to have been clearly as much their interest to remove as your own."

"Oh, Aubrey, my dear friend!" cried Mr. Musgrave, trembling with nervous agitation, "what hopes do you awaken? for if your surmises be correct, then I am not so completely in the power of Lord Allerdale and the lawyer, and I may save my poor Ellinor, if not from the loss of our estates, at least from a marriage which she abhors, but which Edmund Conyers has of late pressed for with a pertinacity that is the more odious, because, beautiful and amiable as she is, Ellinor does not, I know, possess his heart."

"I require not," said Aubrey, in a voice that slightly trembled, despite his utmost self-command, "I require not the incentive of rescuing Miss Musgrave from an alliance so repugnant to her, to urge me to the task of exploring the chambers which you may well be pardoned for fearing to enter ; but I own, Mr. Musgrave, that such a prospect, the prospect of saving Ellinor from a union with Edmund Conyers, with the precious hope of being myself honoured in the possession of her hand, would command my exertions in a service full of danger, of which there is none in what you require."

"Then you will go, my dear friend—you will go at once!"

said Mr. Musgrave, eagerly, and, drawing a bunch of keys from a bureau as he spoke, he put them into the hands of Aubrey, with directions as to the doors which they would open ; then, as the young man, having kindled a chamber lamp, quitted the library, he sunk upon his knees, and endeavoured to beguile in prayer the awfully anxious moments of his absence.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"But love itself could never pant,
For all that beauty sighs to grant,
With half the fervour hate bestows
Upon the last embrace of foes."

THE GIAOUR.

TERRIBLE seemed the storm and tempest, of that dreary winter night, alike to those who were sheltered beneath the roof of the humble cottage or the stately hall. Sadly, like the cry of a warning spirit, sounded in the ears of Aubrey the melancholy gust, as he glided through the long deserted chambers of the "Agnes Tower," with the tale of the scenes they had witnessed yet lingering in his ears to test the firmness of even his well-strung nerves: but far more terrible was that night to the wretched traveller exposed to its fury on the lonely heath, or amidst the hideous recesses of the rocks, where a false step, on a path slippery with snow, would hurl the hapless wanderer a shapeless mangled mass into the depths of the awful gulf that yawned below. It was a night when the elements seemed to threaten the life exposed to their fury; but the raging elements are less merciless than man, and the lone traveller may escape the roaring torrent and the driving gust, or pass in safety by the snow drift or along the narrow ledge of the beetling rocks, when he shall not escape the malice of his fellow man.

So thought and said Aubrey's late companion, Maitland,

as, with torn garments and bleeding hands and feet, and lighted only by the feeble ray of a small lanthorn fastened to his waist by a leathern girdle, he scrambled his way among rocks and gaping ravines, still more embarrassed in his dangerous path by the necessity of lending some support and assistance to a miserable looking object who accompanied him, a tall gaunt man, upon whose worn features the seal of suffering and sickness was deeply set. Often did this poor creature pause, and, urging his inability to brave the storm, implore Maitland to proceed without him, to abandon him to his fate; and then would Maitland speak a few words of encouragement, or compel the other to swallow a small quantity of brandy from a flask which he carried, and give him heart and hope, and urge him on; and thus the two proceeded. A better angel than had usually directed his actions prompted the man Maitland that night, an angel of mercy to himself no less than to the poor creature whom he guided, and the dark volume of his existence was to close with a white leaf. But a spirit other than that which prompted the good deed of Maitland had his agents too abroad upon that fearful night. A terror of the person whom they were really doomed to meet quickened the senses both of Maitland and his companion, and even amid the howling winds they detected other steps than their own upon the slippery rocks.

"'Tis he!" cried Maitland, turning ghastly pale; "we cannot retreat—there is not a niche to shelter us—hold you the lanthorn, and I will face him."

The words were hardly pronounced when, face to face, indeed, the new comer and Maitland stood upon the narrow ledge of rocks piled thick with snow, and with a ghastly

precipice yawning below. "Oh, unfortunate, unfortunate!" moaned the companion of Maitland; "and if we had but passed this rock we should have reached the level ground and have been safe."

These words were lost, however, in the cry, the yell rather, with which, the moment he set his eyes on him, the new comer sprang like a wolf upon Maitland. "Ah, villain, traitor!" he cried, "do we meet again?"

"Stand off!" cried Maitland, fiercely; "at your own peril be it to do me harm, for in the hands of Aubrey Conyers have I placed a full relation of those crimes in which we shared, and if I reclaim it not ere noon to-morrow, he will publish that relation to the world."

"And think you," said the stranger, in a savage accent, and still tightening his grasp on Maitland, "that I am the fool to believe that, if I suffer you to escape me now, you will spare to me while you live, the ruin of those discoveries which you would leave to me as a legacy of evil after your death? No, no! to spare you now would not be to save myself, but to give you life to triumph in my ruin; base villain that you are, you hold yourself prepared to favour Musgrave, because you think the fortunes of Lord Allerdale are destroyed; you at least shall not triumph over him or me!"

These last words were uttered at intervals, while the speaker grappled fiercely with Maitland, who wrestled strongly in return. Each tried to hurl the other over the precipice, their feet slipped in the snow, and they fell together, the shelving narrow ledge of rocks would not support them, and down they went, the stones loosened by their fall crashing after them, and rising over them like a cairn when their bodies lay all crushed and mangled in the dell below. Worn

out as he was with long physical and mental suffering, the wretched companion of Maitland had fainted on the first encounter with the stranger, and was thus spared the horror of actually witnessing the awful death of the foes whose enmity death only could appease.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"They have tied me to a stake, I cannot fly!
But, bear-like, I must fight the course."

MACBETH.

EARLY in the morning of the day that followed Aubrey's arrival at Ravenglas, an express from London was brought to Lord Allerdale at the castle. His lordship was alone, and after eyeing the missive with curiosity mingled with a certain expression of fear, he rang the bell, and demanded if Mr. Benedict had not yet risen, for the lawyer was a guest at the castle.

"So please you, my lord," answered the servant to whom this inquiry was addressed, "Mr. Benedict went out late last night, and has not yet returned."

"Desire him to attend me immediately that he does return, then," said the peer, and the servant bowed and withdrew. Lord Allerdale again eyed the letter that lay unopened before him; he longed yet feared to examine it; there are misfortunes so dreadful that at times we prefer even the horrors of suspense to the still greater horrors of certainty, we snatch at the last wreck of hope, and cling to it like the drowning person to a straw. This kind of suspense cannot, however, be long endured, and Lord Allerdale took up the letter, turned it over, examined the seal, and then with a kind of

desperation tore it open. A glance sufficed to make him acquainted with the contents ; the fatal paper fell from his hand, and he sank back in his chair, pale as a corpse and shaking as if in an ague fit. Presently a few disjointed sentences broke from his lips : " For myself, perhaps, I could bear it ; I am no longer young ; but my boy, my poor Edmund, to behold him so humbled, so destroyed. Francis even may fight up against the blow, he has always been accustomed to the prospect of carving out his own fortunes ; but Edmund, —ah, there are still the estates of Ravenglas, and this day, ay this hour, shall his claim on them be sealed ; for well do I believe that Benedict's conjecture was correct, and that it is to Musgrave himself, and his affected notions of honour, that we owe much of this calamity ! His *honour*, indeed ! well, let him look to it ; let him command the union of his niece with Edmund to-night,—he will bring down the licence with him ; or else let Musgrave account for some other of his *honourable* deeds. What can delay this man, this Benedict ? I should have liked him to go with me to Ravenglas." Again Lord Allerdale rung, and as he addressed the servant who entered in his usual cold and imperious tone, it would have required indeed a nice observer to have detected the storm of furious emotions that overwhelmed his soul, masked as they were by his passionless ice-like demeanour. Mr. Benedict had not yet returned, and the carriage being made ready, Lord Allerdale departed for Ravenglas alone. On arriving at the manor-house, the peer was immediately shown into the library, where he found seated Richard Musgrave, the curate Arlington, Ellinor, and a strange gentleman, who was however named to him as Mr. Horatio Neville.

" I can well surmise, sir," said Lord Allerdale, slightly bowing to the eminent lawyer, " the errand that has brought

you to Ravenglas ; it is, I suppose, to announce to Mr. Musgrave the triumph of his friend."

"I should not have intruded upon Mr. Musgrave, who is a stranger to me, for any such purpose," replied Neville ; "but Mr. Aubrey Conyers being a visitor here, I was naturally anxious myself to announce to him the decision of the House of Lords."

"And so, before even the decision of the Lords was announced, Aubrey Conyers was invited hither !" said the titular baron, turning with a dark countenance and quivering lip to Mr. Musgrave. "Think you, Richard Musgrave, that I am blinder than the mole—that I have not seen through the designs of your base revenge ? You, you it was, I have never doubted, who gave the first suggestion to this young man of his legal claim to an inheritance which, morally, was the right of my son."

"Pardon me, Lord Allerdale," said Musgrave, using, out of a feeling of kindness and delicacy, the title which the person he addressed could no longer claim, "pardon me ; the moral right of Aubrey Conyers was no less than his legal one, and I should have felt myself a party to a most cruel fraud, had I not made to him the suggestion of which you speak. He has obtained no more than his right, and without any suggestion of mine he knew that his family was a branch of yours ; the relation of that branch has been finally established by the papers which Mr. Neville procured in France. Blame me not, then, for what has happened ; I acted only as a man with a common sense of honesty and honour."

"A man of honour and honesty !" said Lord Allerdale, bitterly ; "have you the effrontery, Richard Musgrave, to lay claim to either in my hearing ? I tell you again, a base spirit

of revenge urged you to put this young man on the claim which has robbed me of my inheritance—a spirit of revenge, and for what ? because you knew that you were as infamous in my eyes as you ought to have been in the sight of the whole world ; and because I spared you the infamy, the ruin which a word of mine would at any time have brought upon you. Oh, man of excellent honour and good faith, is your fair niece, yonder, prepared to keep her troth plighted to my son ; or, with honesty and honour equal to her uncle's, has she reserved her hand merely for the heir of the lordship of Allerdale ?”

“ Why do you persist in urging this claim ?” said Musgrave. “ You know that Ellinor and your son do not love each other. You are to take possession of this house to-morrow, and the last acre of our land is now abandoned to you. You talk of revenge ; oh, do not push your revenge so far—for it is revenge, Lord Allerdale, which makes you insist that Ellinor should bestow her hand upon your son. Oh ! ask me not to compel her to a sacrifice so cruel. I will not ; I dare not do it !”

“ Tell me not, Richard Musgrave, of what you will not, or dare not do !” said Lord Allerdale, with a domineering insolence of manner which filled Neville and the curate with astonishment, and awakened the spirit of indignation and resistance in Ellinor. Richard Musgrave trembled and grew pale, while his enemy, for such Lord Allerdale evidently was, went on with an aspect of malignant triumph : “ Recollect, Richard Musgrave, the loss of the barony to me alters not a jot the dangers of your position ; you shall execute my commands ; refuse at your peril, or that of this beloved niece.”

The paleness, the trembling of Mr. Musgrave increased at

these words, and Ellinor, while she hastened to support him, turned her face, glowing with indignation, upon his tormentor, as she said,

“Sir, sir ! what I will call an overstrained sentiment of honour and generosity has hitherto’ induced me to hold to the engagement with your eldest son—an engagement with a man whom I never loved, and whom I have latterly had but too much reason to despise. I would not have had it said that it was the heir of Lord Allerdale only whom I was willing to marry ; but there are bounds both for my pride and my patience ; here, in the presence of Mr. Arlington and of Mr. Neville, you have dared threaten my uncle ; you have even implied that he is guilty of some monstrous crime ; understand, sir, I love him too well, I am too well acquainted with his noble, kindly heart, for one moment to credit the slanders of your tongue ; and much as I would sacrifice for him on my own behalf, I will yield nothing on his, and I will not enter the family of the man who has dared so atrociously to belie him.”

“You will not, young lady !” said Lord Allerdale, whose anger was yet further exasperated by Ellinor’s omission when speaking, of the title by which the other persons present had, in mere courtesy, addressed him ; “you will not !” he repeated. “You had better recall those words, if you really love this amiable uncle so much. It may not be grateful to learn that he on whom you have lavished your affection should, in justice, be to you, above all the world, the object of loathing, and punishment, and horror.”

“Your reverses, sir, must have deprived you of your senses,” said Ellinor, “or you would not venture upon assertions so monstrous. My dear uncle an object of loathing and horror to me ! oh, impossible !”

As the young girl spoke, she kissed the cold brow of her uncle, who, livid as a corpse, had sunk back in his chair deprived of speech and almost of consciousness. The other persons present were silent ; the curate was awe-stricken, and Horatio Neville apprehensive that Lord Allerdale had, indeed, some fatal secret in his keeping.

"It is well," said the latter, with a sneer worthy of Mr. Benedict himself, "it is well, doubtless, that you should lavish so much filial affection upon the fratricide Richard Musgrave, the murderer of your own father, the proofs of whose guilt lie yet within the ' Agnes Tower ! ' "

The wild shriek, full of horror as it was, which Ellinor uttered as those dreadful those unexpected words smote her ears, was yet overwhelmed in the wilder clamour, the confusion of sounds that rose without, and simultaneously the door of the library was thrown open, and gave admittance to a crowd of persons, among whom were Aubrey Conyers, and the gaunt-looking man who had been the companion of Maitland on the preceding night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"*He* should have died hereafter ;
There would have been a time for such a word !"

MACBETH.

THERE was not more consternation, more horror, imprinted in that terrible moment on the countenances of Ellinor Musgrave and her unhappy uncle than was visible, even on their entrance, in those of Aubrey and his companions, among the latter of whom was Mr. Blundell, a neighbouring magistrate, and a person of large property, and the man Harris and his wife, the proprietors of the Wheatsheaf-inn, upon the heath.

Lord Allerdale (for to avoid confusion we shall still call him by that title) was standing opposite the door when these persons entered, the wicked smile of triumph still curling his lip, as he gazed triumphantly down upon the pale Richard Musgrave and his niece.

"You here, my lord !" exclaimed Aubrey. "Alas, alas !" and as he spoke he hastily closed the door, but he could not shut out the heart-rending female shrieks which had before overwhelmed the cry of Ellinor. "Mrs. Harris," then said Aubrey, "go, go, and endeavour to calm that unhappy young woman ; she may know and submit to your voice, even amid her distraction."

Mrs. Harris hastened to obey the mandate, and hurried

from the room ; but Lord Allerdale noticed nothing peculiar, either in the manner of Aubrey or that of the persons who accompanied him ; he saw only his young and successful rival, and even as he had triumphed over Richard Musgrave did he think that the heir of Allerdale was prepared to triumph over him.

" Yes, I am here, *my lord !*" he said, in reply to the first words uttered by Aubrey. " I regret to intrude upon the pleasant party you might have held with Mr. Musgrave and his niece ; but, as you are yourself a witness, and a proof, long outstanding debts must be paid, and justice will have her course at last, whether it be to strip me of a title and wealth not my own, or after the lapse of long years to discover a foul murder !"

" A murder !" said Mr. Blundell, who had caught only the last words of Lord Allerdale ; " have they then told you ? oh, my lord, have patience."

" Patience !" responded Lord Allerdale, " oh yes, and justice too !"

" Alas, my lord," returned Mr. Blundell, " what can justice do with this poor insane wretch ?—what but pronounce confinement in a madhouse as the fittest sentence ?"

" Yes, yes, confinement in a madhouse !" cried Lord Allerdale, with a bitter laugh, " confinement in a madhouse would be a just and merciful sentence ; for though Mr. Musgrave has preserved through the course of fifteen years a perfectly sane knowledge of his guilt, I do believe that it was in a fit of temporary frenzy that he murdered his brother."

" Mr. Musgrave ! his brother !" ejaculated Mr. Blundell, with a voice and look of astonishment. " To whom or what do you allude ? It was of a horrible murder, just committed, that I spoke."

"I know nothing, care nothing, about murders just committed!" said Lord Allerdale, with a savage accent. "I speak of Richard Musgrave, and I dare him to deny that he murdered his brother Leonard, in a chamber of the 'Agnes Tower,' fifteen years ago."

"Alas, alas! my sin has found me out!" murmured the unhappy Musgrave, "and the days and nights of anguish I have known, shall terminate in disgrace to my innocent Ellinor, and the scaffold for myself. Ellinor, Ellinor, I ask you not to forgive me; these hands were indeed stained with the life-blood of your father; but mad, infuriated though I was, I shed that blood in bitter vengeance for your mother's wrongs. But I name not forgiveness; oh, who shall forgive me for the blood of my brother!"

The stranger whom the unhappy Maitland had rescued, had hitherto stood apart from the other persons assembled, but now, as he stepped forward and waved his hand with an imperious gesture, those who were nearest Richard Musgrave drew instinctively aside, all but Ellinor, who, with a countenance pale as ashes, and fixed tearless eyes, still knelt by her uncle's feet, and kept repeating, as if unconsciously, "It is false, it is false! he, my good, kind uncle!—it cannot be!"

"Richard Musgrave," said the stranger, in a voice full of deep and mournful melody, "there lives one who can forgive you, even the blood of your brother; who can say that it was an honest wrath which instigated that hasty, fatal blow; and that too severely, with the misery that has clouded your otherwise blameless life, have you expiated that one moment of rashness. Look up, Richard; sorrow has laid her hand heavily on me too; it has taught me repentance, and expiation of deeds far worse than yours; it has taught me to forgive, even as I would be forgiven. Forgive me, then, forgive

me, as I have long forgiven thee, with heart and soul, best, most generous of men ; forgive me, Richard, my brother !”

Richard Musgrave looked up with a bewildered air, at these words, and putting back the grey locks from the stranger’s brow, seemed studying to remember his features ; but Lord Allerdale, with a laugh that chilled the blood of his hearers, exclaimed, “ Now, then, I will believe in Destiny, who fools us in the very ripening of our plots, since thou, thou, Leonard Musgrave, art sane and free, and I stand before you a homeless, outcast, dishonoured man ! I, who owed you so just a hatred. Curses on the fool and villain, Benedict, that he did not long since seal our safety with your blood. Murderer as he was of the miserable Delaval, I knew he would not have spared your life but to make it, as he has made it—a threat and a terror to myself—the scourge with which he compelled me to yield to him more than half the spoil which we jointly extorted from your imbecile brother. Oh but, Benedict, in this ruin which overtakes both me and mine, you shall not escape !”

“ Unhappy man !” said Leonard Musgrave, “ unconscious yet of a stroke more heavy than the loss of lands and wealth, the wretched Benedict, the partner,—should I not rather say, the instigator of your worst sins, is beyond the reach of your wrath, answering to a tribunal, not of this world, for his woful deeds. Terrible indeed, was the justice of his fate, who, locked in the grasp of the unfortunate Salton, the repentant accomplice in his guilt and yours, the joint murderer of the gambler, Delaval, was precipitated last night from the rock that hems in the mine which your barbarity made my prison for so many years.”

“ Is he dead, then ? Benedict dead !” ejaculated Lord Allerdale ; “ has he escaped in death the infamy that waits

on me, and on my children ! Oh ! my son, my Edmund, how will he bear his father's shame !”

As the miserable man uttered the last words, his insane fierceness seemed to fail, and sinking into the nearest chair, he wrung his hands and wept and moaned.

“ Were it not well,” said Mr. Blundell, addressing Aubrey and Leonard Musgrave, “ to let him know the dreadful truth at once ? Under the influence of his present feelings he will bear it best.”

To this proposition both Aubrey and Leonard Musgrave assented ; but the former turned away, and the latter bent over his half-insensible brother, as the magistrate, approaching the wretched Lord Allerdale, laid his hand impressively on his arm, as he said, “ Poor, unfortunate, guilty man, cease these useless regrets, or let them change their object ; your son Edmund is past being afflicted either by your sorrow or your sin ; let us hope that his more venial faults are atoned for by his timeless, fatal end.”

Lord Allerdale looked up eagerly in the countenance of the speaker, whose last words he repeated. “ His fatal end ! my son, my Edmund—what accident has befallen him ? Oh, if you have mercy, speak, and let me know the worst at once : is he ill—is he dead ?”

“ I cannot tell you to be patient,” returned Mr. Blundell ; “ though I must tell you to believe that very worst at which your fears have pointed !”

“ He is dead, then !” cried the wretched father, in a voice of agony. The silence of his auditors was a terrible reply ; and again sinking back in his chair, he uttered one low sob of anguish, and was himself silent. The persons present thought that he had swooned, and Aubrey and Mr. Neville,

raising him up, loosened his cravat, and threw water on his face ; but he never showed a sign of life again. The ruin of his fortunes, the discovery of his long-concealed cruelty and guilt—and, above all, the loss of his son—were blows that followed each other in too quick succession, and he had expired in a fit of apoplexy.



DEATH OF EDMUND CONYERS.

1

CHAPTER XXX.

"I am the murderer! wherefore are ye come?

Wist ye whence I come?

The tomb where dwells the dead—and I dwelt with him,
Till sense of life dissolved away within me!"

BERTRAM.

A LONG and miserable night was that at Ravensglas, when the unhappy Lord Allerdale and his son both lay dead beneath its ancient roof; and when Richard Musgrave and his brother, restored from a living tomb, were compelled to explanations which it was agony alike to give and to hear. Ellinor, worn out with the excitement and horror of the past day, slept under the influence of the opiate which had been administered to her: while in another apartment the venerable curate did indeed render "good for evil," when he sought by every argument of reason and religion to soothe the misery of Francis Conyers, whose callous selfish heart even, was pierced by the calamities, the shame, of the late events. Mr. Neville and Mr. Blundell were occupied with the man Harris, making notes of the account he gave of the iniquitous partnership of Lord Allerdale and the lawyer Benedict. Few words, however, are necessary to detail the misery of years; the explanations of Richard Musgrave and his brother were mingled with tears and mutual entreaties for forgiveness; but it appeared from the evidence of Harris, that they had never known a grief of which Lord Allerdale was not the cause. Of

a grasping as well as imperious temper, from his youth he had coveted the lands of Ravenglas, to unite them to his own rich possessions. He hated both the Musgraves, for no worthier reason than that the lands of their inheritance were as fair as his own ; and so immediately contiguous that he was possessed with an insane desire to unite them. This desire, however, as absurd as it was unjust, would not have led him to injure the Musgraves, had he not conceived a violent passion for the Lady Geraldine, the mother of Ellinor, who rejected him to accept Leonard Musgrave. Lord Allerdale knew that the lady had been originally the destined bride of the elder brother Richard ; he knew, too, the compact which the latter had generously made, not himself to marry, if the parents of Lady Geraldine would consent to her union with Leonard. And without having at first any more fixed motive than that of gratifying his malice against all parties, he encouraged all the follies and faults of the, at that time, selfish and dissolute Leonard ; but especially did he delight in witnessing the positive ill-usage which he inflicted on his wife. The profligacy, the extravagance of Leonard were at length indulged to an excess which human patience could not endure ; and arrangements were made by his brother for him to proceed to India. With the large sum of money, however, with which his still too generous brother supplied him for this purpose, Leonard Musgrave repaired to London, where he squandered the whole amount in gambling ; then he secretly returned to Ravenglas, and, in company with a profligate companion named Delaval, he forced himself into the apartments of his wife in the "Agnes Tower." It should be observed, that the principal agent of Lord Allerdale and Benedict, with regard to the Musgraves, was the valet of Leonard, a Swiss, named Salton ; and that this Salton bore as great an

enmity to Delaval as Lord Allerdale and Benedict nursed against the Musgraves. Salton, who had accompanied his master on his secret visit to Ravenglas, took care to inform Lord Allerdale and his minion Benedict of that visit. The result proved more favourable to their wicked hopes than the conspirators themselves could have imagined. Richard Musgrave, visiting the apartments of his sister-in-law, to bid her farewell for the night, found her engaged in a violent altercation with her husband—her maid having been dismissed for the night. Her jewels, which Leonard had taken from a bureau which he had forced open, lay upon the dressing-table; Delaval, a man of low origin, and, in the outset of life, a companion of Salton, stood by; and Salton, by whose direction Lord Allerdale and Benedict had repaired to Ravenglas, had gone to admit them by the postern door, which had given his master and himself ingress to the "Agnes Tower." During the few minutes of Salton's absence, however, occurred that fatal catastrophe which placed the unfortunate Richard Musgrave in the power of his mortal foes. Heated with wine, and exasperated by Delaval, whose vile imagination always assumed in others a turpitude equal to his own, the grossness of conduct and language in Leonard Musgrave knew no bounds, till after indulging in the most detestable accusations of his brother's generous friendship for the unfortunate Lady Geraldine, he raised his hand, and struck her senseless to the floor.

When Salton, in company with Benedict and Lord Allerdale, entered the apartment, they found Lady Geraldine still in a swoon, her husband weltering in his blood, and Richard Musgrave standing in a state of bewilderment beside the apparent corpse, and the knife with which he had struck the fatal blow still reeking in his hand.

Delaval had vanished, and with him the jewels of Lady Geraldine. It should be observed, that the tray from which Lady Geraldine had taken her slight supper, still stood on the table, and from that tray Richard Musgrave had snatched the knife. Had he then, as Aubrey long years afterwards observed to him, when intrusted with his sad story, had but the moral courage to call in his servants, to send for medical assistance and legal authorities, and own what in the frenzy of an excusable anger he had done, he had escaped all the terrors of the law, and much of the accusations of his conscience. But he assumed that his brother was dead, and frantically implored his friends to aid him in concealing the body: the dungeons and secret passages of the "Agnes Tower" had been contrived in feudal days, and afforded ample means of concealment, and a few words, unnoticed by Richard in the excess of his consternation, passing between Benedict and Lord Allerdale, showed to each that the other saw his interest in the removal of Leonard Musgrave, and that to promote that interest it was necessary to leave Richard with the impression that he was his murderer. Hastily then, with the assistance of Salton, they removed the bleeding body to the lower apartments, but there they encountered Delaval, who, not sufficiently familiar with the place, had missed the passage by which he entered. Lord Allerdale, having assisted to bear the body of Leonard down stairs, returned to the half-distracted Richard, and Benedict and Salton were left alone with Delaval. Salton taxed him with the possession of the jewels, which he had observed were removed from the dressing table; Delaval was insolent, and refused either to give them up or share them with the confederates, and the result was to him really that violent end which Richard Musgrave thought he

had inflicted on his brother. From that fatal night was dated the life's misery of Richard and Leonard Musgrave. Richard was persuaded that he had deprived his brother of existence, and weeks afterwards the decaying body of Delaval was shown to him by Salton and Benedict, in a dungeon of the "Agnes Tower," as a proof. As for Lady Geraldine, the stains of blood upon the carpet when she recovered from her swoon, told her that some fatal encounter had taken place, but knowing what bitter provocation her husband's brother had received, and that all which that brother might have suffered or done was in her behalf, she shut the horror of her thoughts in her own breast, affected to believe as she was told, that a blow in the face had caused that effusion of blood, voluntarily inflicted a severe wound in her own hand to account for those stains which could not be wholly cleared away, and sickened, and died in three weeks. Immediately on her death did Richard close the apartments of the "Agnes Tower," but the anguish of his mind, his belief that he was the murderer of his brother, induced fits of somnambulism, in the paroxysms of which he would take the keys of the "Agnes Tower," and explore the most secret recesses of that building which he did not dare to enter when awake. One of these fits had seized the unfortunate Richard on the night of Aubrey's first visit to Ravenglas; it was his cry that disturbed Aubrey, and it was Mr. Benedict whom the latter followed through the long deserted rooms, whither the lawyer had repaired to secure some documents relative to the estates of Ravenglas, which Richard himself did not dare enter those rooms to seek. In the meantime, while the unfortunate Richard suffered these pangs of conscience for the supposed murder of his brother, that brother lived, a wretched maniac, in the secret recesses of a mine, whither he had been con-

veyed by Benedict, and where, before long, Salton, as knowing too much, was made his fellow prisoner. It would have been both safer and easier to have disposed of both Salton and his master, by decreeing for them a violent end, than to keep them thus imprisoned; but Benedict himself had not taken any active part in the murder of Delaval, he had stood by while Salton struck him down, and he had shared the spoils, but he still, with the delusion of a bad man, flattered himself that blood was not upon his hand, and Lord Allerdale shrunk from the idea of blood altogether. These confederates had an interest too in prolonging the miserable life of Leonard Musgrave: for as his daughter grew up, they would, did she presume to offend them, produce her father to forestall her in the succession to the estates of Ravenglas; which in the meantime the large sums which they had forced Richard Musgrave to advance, as they pretended chiefly for hush-money to Salton, compelled him to mortgage. Salton, however, finally effected his escape from the mine, and, touched alike by the manifest sufferings of Mr. Musgrave and the generous character of Aubrey, he felt a real repentance for his own crimes, and determined at all risks to himself to release Leonard Musgrave. Apprehensive, however, of the encounter with Benedict, which actually occurred, he placed a succinct relation of past events in the hands of Aubrey before he set out for the mines. The result of that expedition is partly known; it ended tragically both for Salton and Benedict, and would have been not less fatal to Leonard Musgrave, but for the opportune arrival of the man Harris on the spot, not five minutes after the frightful descent of Benedict and Salton from the cliff. This man Harris, who had fallen into the power of the lawyer, from the knowledge which the latter had of his share in a

smuggling transaction in which a revenue officer was slain, had never with a good will supported the cruelties of Benedict, and finding that man was no more, he gladly agreed to accompany Leonard Musgrave to the inn at A——, where the unfortunate Salton had desired Aubrey to await his coming. Harris did this the more willingly because he heartily hated the whole race of Lord Allerdale, on account of the seduction of his niece Magdalen by the eldest son of that nobleman. It should be observed that Benedict had, years before, taken care to remove the remains of Delaval from the dungeon in the "Agnes Tower," but both he and Lord Allerdale had led Musgrave to believe that the bones were still there, and that they were those of his brother: he had not courage to examine those vaults himself, and to that task he persuaded Aubrey, who of course did not find there any such horrible relics.

CHAPTER XXXI

“Why do ye gaze on me?
I loved *him*, yea I love, in death I love *him*;
I killed him, but I loved *him*,
What arm shall loose the grasp of love and death?”

BERTRAM.

WHILE the above fearful revelations were being made by Leonard Musgrave to his brother, and through the medium of the man Harris to Mr. Neville and Mr. Blundell, those revelations being assisted greatly by the packet which Salton had placed in the hands of Aubrey, he, whose thoughts, amid the strange horror of the scenes of the day, had scarce time to dwell even for a moment on the happy change in his own fortunes, betook himself to the chamber in which lay the lifeless body of the once gay and careless Edmund Conyers; for there was one living whose great suffering equalled, if it did not outweigh, even her great guilt.

Edmund Conyers had been shot on entering the park gate of Ravensglas; and as he fell from his horse, a female stepped forward from amid a neighbouring thicket, and acknowledging herself the murderess, prayed to be delivered into the hands of justice. While the lodge-keeper and the groom of Edmund were still in the consternation occasioned by the frightful deed, a considerable cavalcade approached the park gates, consisting in fact of Aubrey Conyers, Leonard Musgrave, Harris, his wife, and the magistrate Mr. Blundell,

the silvery moonbeams touched it with an almost angelic serenity, and nothing could be more sweetly mournful than the smile which played about the lip. Beside that table, with her long hair hanging loose over her shoulders, and showing by contrast with its raven blackness her face as white and more rigid than that of the corpse itself, sat Magdalen Rushton. At a little distance were the two officers watching her, for they feared lest she should attempt her own life; she had exhibited an absolute fury on their endeavouring to remove her from the body, but was perfectly quiet when they suffered her to remain near it. She still kept her immovable attitude, with her eyes riveted, as if by a horrible fascination, on the features of the murdered youth, when Aubrey entered the apartment. It was not till he had spoken to her twice that his voice aroused her from her lethargy, then looking up, she gazed at him steadily and put her hand to her forehead as if she had a difficulty in collecting her thoughts. "Ah," she said at length, with a lamentable sigh, "I remember now, you are Lieutenant Conyers; well, did I not tell you aright, that for your sister's sake alone would Edmund break his faith with me? Hark you, Lieutenant Conyers, I heard something about a rich heiress who was to be his bride, and that I could not bear—would she, could she have loved him as I loved? But his bridal garment will be the shroud, and the great lady, I think, will not envy me, Edmund, thy bride, a share of thy damp and lowly dwelling."

What comfort could be given to this unhappy young woman, even more miserable than she was guilty, whom the consciousness of shame and the frenzy of jealousy had driven to murder the man on whom she doated? yet the compassionate heart of Aubrey suggested pitying, if not consoling

words for her; he endeavoured to excuse her crime by speaking of the temporary madness under which he most truly believed that it was committed. But Magdalen answered him with that look of cold disdain, which was of old the expression of her beautiful and imposing features. "I am not a mad woman, Lieutenant Conyers!" she said; "like most of my sex, I have fallen a victim to my own weakness and vanity. Though in the society of my poor uncle's family there were, alas, few supports for a rigorous female virtue, and much misery to provoke guilt, it did not form an excuse for me, for I had arrived at years of discretion, I had received an excellent moral education from my dear mother; and I ought not to have been the dupe of Edmund Conyers, I ought not to have hoped that he would ever marry me. But if I sinned in believing him, he sinned no less in the lie that made me his dupe; and heavily has he answered for that falsehood, answered with a penalty which must now in turn be mine, for I too must die! I could not outlive you, Edmund, no, not even for the scanty space which the law would allow to the murderess!"

"Encourage not a thought so dreadful!" said Aubrey, "the law will not punish your frenzy as if it were a cold-blooded murder."

"Do you think that if even the law would give it, life has anything to charm me?" returned Magdalen. "No, no, I have done with life; my only hope is, that the last long sleep will have no dreams. Farewell, Lieutenant Conyers, perhaps I should call you Lord Allerdale, but your old name sounds most tender to my ears at this dreadful moment, for it reminds me of your sweet sister, whom had I known earlier, I dare believe would have made me a better and a wiser woman. My blessings rest upon her innocent head, if the

blessings of such a wretch as I am be not a curse ! Farewell then, Lieutenant Conyers, farewell ; if you pity me, leave me to myself : have I not food for contemplation, for recollection here ? ”

As the miserable woman spoke, she pointed with a sombre look to the pallid features of the dead, and then bowing down her head upon the cold breast, remained wrapped in gloomy silence, while Aubrey, overcome by the interview, withdrew more in pity than in horror from the chamber of death.

Throughout that weary night the wretched Magdalen kept her watch by her dead lover ; in the morning arrived the order for her removal to Carlisle, there to take her trial for the murder. It had been feared that she would again violently oppose a separation from the corpse : but after fervently kissing the cold lips, and taking one lingering look at the still features, she announced her readiness to depart.

She had not tasted food since the catastrophe of the preceding day, and now, ere she left Ravenglas, refreshments were again offered to her, of which she would not partake.

On reaching Carlisle she fainted, from exhaustion of body and mind, but on her recovery she still refused to touch the food which was prepared for her. She had resolved not to live, and having about her no implement of self-destruction, there remained only the horrible expedient of starving herself to death ; and by this resolve, in spite of the threats, the entreaties of her attendants, in spite of the horrible agonies of such a death, she stedfastly abided. In her last moments she sent a letter to Aubrey, entreating that as the law had not condemned her, and her body would be at the disposal of her friends, he would, in benevo-

lence and Christian charity, suffer her poor remains to be placed at the foot of Edward's coffin, in the family vault at Allerdale. "The only consolation I now have," concluded the letter, "is in the hope, my lord, that you will grant this humble request, that in death at least I shall be united with him, whom the world's forms, its base and false systems, alone divided me from in life ; for oh, Lord Allerdale, the heart of Edmund was originally honest and good ; it was his position, and its provocations to vice, that ruined both him and me."

With this request the new Lord Allerdale thought proper to comply, and the simple coffin of the unhappy Magdalen was placed near that of her destroyer. Mr. Francis Conyers was not pleased with the new peer's gracious consideration of the last wishes of a murderess : but as Lord Allerdale had been liberal, even to a romantic generosity, towards himself, it would have ill accorded with his ideas of political expediency to have shown his displeasure. Some stings of conscience too, did the fate of Magdalen and his brother awaken for Francis Conyers when, with the memory of them, the sweet pale face of the gentle Rose Arlington rose before his mental eye. And when afterwards he stood before the world as the wealthy husband of the manufacturer's widow, and a most successful diplomatist, there were moments when the memory of the curate's daughter rankled like a wound which no self-love could heal.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"And all these sorrows past shall serve,
For sweet discourses in the time to come!"

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE old tale of sorrows ending with marriage, where, unfortunately, people's troubles sometimes begin, might perhaps be spared, but we like to be old-fashioned and particular, and speak even of the world's reward to those who had endured the world's sorrows bravely. Therefore, we will say, that as the Baron of Allerdale, Aubrey so well remembered the trials of Lieutenant Conyers, that he had ever an attentive ear and a liberal hand for those who were suffering from what he knew by bitter experience was the most cruel of all poverty—the poverty of the struggling educated middle classes. In this, as in all other works of benevolence, he was joined heart and hand by his fair wife, Ellinor, the heiress of Ravenglas; nor did he lack the liberal coalition of Richard Musgrave and his brother Leonard, who lived together in all Christian charity and love, each, as he looked over the bitterness of past years, ever eager to condemn himself and forgive the other. As for Horatio Neville, with the beautiful Adela Conyers for his wife, he pursued his course, winning "golden opinions from all sorts of men," and respect and honour for a profession which, in the hands of such persons as Nicholas Benedict is a meet subject only of loathing and contempt. With regard to Colonel Colman,

the world thought that Lord Allerdale and Aubrey Conyers were quite different persons, and that the conduct which was excusable towards one, was quite inexcusable towards the other ; so Aubrey was offered a commission in the Guards, and Colonel Colman exchanged into a regiment ordered on foreign service. How the good squire Featherstonehaugh rejoiced in these events we need not say. No friend, however humble, was forgotten by the grateful Aubrey or his sister : Mrs. Windsor, and her daughter Charlotte, were placed in a comfortable position ; the Harrises in a more honest mode of life ; and the troubles and trials of the poor curate, Arlington, alleviated, so far as money and the tenderest sympathy could alleviate them. As the tide of good no less than evil fortune runs high when it takes the turn, it pleased General St. Leger to pardon in Lord Allerdale and his sister what he would not forgive in the dependents of his own bounty ; and dying soon after Aubrey's accession to the title, he left the whole of his large fortune to be divided between Mrs. Neville and the inheritor of the LORDSHIP OF ALLERDALE !

THE END.

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